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The SECOND EDITION, Corrected of

I. **T**HE DIVINE AUTHORITY of the OLD and NEW TESTAMENT ASSERTED; with a particular Vindication of the Characters of *Moses* and the Prophets, our Saviour **JESUS CHRIST** and his Apostles, against the unjust Aspersions and false Reasonings in both the Volumes of the Moral Philosopher. By **JOHN LELAND, D. D.** The second Volume may be had alone.

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Jer Gill

A N
A N S W E R
T O A
B O O K

INTITULED,
Christianity as Old as the Creation.

PART II.

In which the Authority and Usefulness of the
Revelation contain'd in the sacred Writings
of the Old and New Testament, is asserted
and vindicated, against the Objections and
Misrepresentations of that Author.

By *JOHN LELAND*, D.D.

The SECOND EDITION Corrected.

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B. O. O. K.



THE SECOND EDITION CORRECTED

JOHN W. D. N.

Printed at the ... and ...

M.D.C.C.



A N
A N S W E R

To a late BOOK, intituled,
Christianity as Old as the Creation.

C H A P. I.

Some Considerations concerning Revelation in general, and what those Proofs and Evidences are, that may be reasonably expected in such a case. An Entrance on the Author's Objections. And first the Attempt he makes to shew that Reason and Revelation are inconsistent, because Revelation supposes we are to be govern'd by Authority, which is a giving up our Reason, considered.

I Have in the first Part of this Answer obviated the principal Objections of this Author against the Expediency or Usefulness of Revelation in general. I have examin'd what he offers concerning the Perfection, the Clearness and Sufficiency of the Law of Nature; and have shewn that no Argument can be brought from any of these, to prove that an external Revelation would be useless or needless. On the contrary it has been shewn, that such an external Revelation

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would

would be of signal use, both to give Men a more clear and certain knowledge of those Principles and Duties of the Law of Nature, which though absolutely speaking they are discoverable by the Light of Reason, yet have been greatly perverted and obscured through the Corruption of Mankind; and also to inform us of other things which we could not of ourselves have discovered, and which yet when known are of very great advantage.

And supposing God gives an extraordinary Revelation at all, the most simple and natural way seems to be this; that he should communicate the Knowledge of his Will to some Persons, to be by them communicated to others. In which case it may be expected, both that he will do it in such a manner, that those to whom he thus communicates his Will, may themselves have a sufficient Certainty that the Revelation comes from him; and that he will also take care that they be able to produce such Credentials of their Divine Mission, as are sufficient to give others a reasonable Assurance that he sent and inspired them.

That God can communicate his Will to Men in such a way, as to give those to whom he thus immediately communicates himself, a satisfying Certainty that it is he that inspires them, cannot reasonably be denied. As to the particular manner of his doing this, it is not what we are obliged to explain; nor is our not being able to explain it the least Prejudice against the Possibility of it. Our Author indeed takes upon him to say, that “as we are fram’d, God cannot ascertain us of any Truth, but by shewing its Agreement with those self-evident Notions, which are the Tests by which we are to judge of every thing, even the Being of a God and natural Religion, p. 184 *”. If he means, that God cannot ascertain us of any thing

thing contrary to those self-evident Notions, it will be easily granted; for he cannot contradict himself. But if he means, as he seems to do, that God can no otherwise ascertain us of any thing, but by such a Process of Reasoning and Argumentation, as one Man ordinarily uses to another, this is a most unreasonable Limitation of the Divine Power; since he that form'd our Spirits may have a thousand ways of operating upon them that we are not acquainted with. He can impress things immediately with a strong irresistible Evidence or over-powering Certainty, so as to take away all doubt, and produce an inward satisfying Assurance and internal Sense of their Truth, in the Minds of the Persons to whom he thus communicates himself. This Author himself supposes something like this in the Case of self-evident Notions; the Knowledge of which he calls a *Divine Inspiration, as being immediately from God, and not acquired by any human deduction or drawing of Consequences*; he calls it that *divine and uniform Light which shines in the Minds of all Men*, p. 182 *. and that *it is God himself that immediately illuminates them*, p. 11 †. He cannot therefore reasonably deny, that God may, if he pleases, communicate the Knowledge of his Will to Men in an immediate way, by making such strong and vigorous Impressions upon the Mind, as carry their own Evidence and Conviction along with them. And indeed we know so little of the various ways of operating upon our Minds, or in what manner Ideas and Notions are impress'd and produced there, that it would be the most inexcusable Presumption to say, that God cannot do it but in such or such a manner.

It does not follow, as this Writer insinuates, p. 243 ||. that *because Numbers have taken their Reveries for Divine Inspirations*, therefore supposing

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true

true Inspirations from God, those to whom they were given could never be assured that they were Inspirations from God. As well might it be argued, that because some Men have taken things for certain and evident Truths which were not so, therefore no Man can ever be certain of any thing, and that there are no such things as evident Truths at all ; or because some Mens Senses have been disordered, therefore no Man's Senses can ever be depended on ; a Principle very foolish in itself, and which would introduce universal Scepticism. Nor is it more to the purpose what our Author there adds, that *evil Beings can impress Notions on Mens Minds as strongly as good Beings*. For whatever Influence evil Beings may have on human Minds, of which we know very little, yet to say that God can do nothing in a way of impressing things upon our Minds, but the Devil can do the same, and with equal Efficacy, that is, that he has as much Power over the Spirits of Men as God himself has or can have, is (to use the Author's Expressions on another occasion) downright *Demonism*, and would in its Consequences lead to the acknowledgment of two supreme independent Principles or Gods, a good and an evil One. It is but reasonable to allow the Author of our Beings to have a nearer Access to our Spirits, and a Power of working upon them in such a Way as no other Being can do. And if one Man can speak or communicate his Thoughts to another in such a manner, that we may be certain that it is he that speaks to us, it would be a strange thing to affirm, that the Author of our Natures, on supposition that he extraordinarily inspires Men, or communicates his Will to them in an immediate way, has no way of letting them know that it is he and no other that inspires them.

And as God will so order it, that those to whom he thus immediately communicates his Will shall have a sufficient Certainty that the Revelation comes from him, so he will take care that the Revelation they deliver in his Name be attended with such Evidence as may be reasonably sufficient to convince others that he has extraordinarily sent and inspired them. And as to this, if the Persons professing to be thus inspired and sent of God appear, as far as we can judge from their whole Temper and Conduct, to be Men of great Probity and Simplicity, not acted by any base selfish Views and Interests, but animated with Love to God and Zeal for his Glory, and with a hearty Benevolence to Mankind: If the Revelation they deliver in his Name be evidently suited to the Necessities of Men; if it clears and confirms the great Principles of the Law of Nature, which were greatly weakned and obscured by the Corruption of Mankind; if its moral Precepts be pure and excellent, and if it furnishes the most powerful Motives to engage Men to the Observation of them; if even those of its Doctrines which we could not have discovered or known, if they had not been thus in an extraordinary manner reveal'd, yet appear upon Examination to have the Characters of Divine Wisdom and Goodness, and manifestly tend, where they are firmly believed, to kindle good Affections and Dispositions in the Soul; if the plain Design and Tendency of the whole be to recover Men from their Sins, to engage them to universal Righteousness and Purity, and to fit them for being eternally happy in the Presence and Enjoyment of the Deity; but especially, if the Persons professing to bring this Revelation from God be enabled, in Confirmation of their Divine Mission, to perform the most illustrious Miracles, visibly transcending all human Power, wrought in the view of multitudes, and

even of their Enemies themselves, watchful and industrious to discover the Imposture, if there had been any : And if to these were added the Attestations of Prophecies, sure Predictions of wonderful Events, which no Wisdom of Man could possibly foresee ; it can scarce be imagin'd, that if a Revelation were truly given from God, it should come attended with a brighter Evidence than all these taken together do form. Nor can it be supposed consistent with the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, that he should suffer all these Marks and Proofs to concur in an Imposture. For this would be to leave Mankind, yea the best and sincerest of Men, who are most earnestly desirous to know his Will and conform themselves to it, no way of distinguishing between a true Revelation and a false one, no way of guarding against an Imposture so circumstanced, and so strongly supported. And I think it may justly be affirm'd, that those who out of a Regard and Submission to these Significations of the Divine Will, should think themselves obliged to receive and believe a Revelation thus attested and confirm'd, would act a good and a reasonable part ; and those who in opposition to all these Proofs and Evidences should continue obstinately to oppose such a Revelation, because there might possibly be an Imposture, which they did not discern and could not prove, would act contrary to the Conduct that Reason prescribes in all other matters. For to reject strong Proofs and Evidences, upon a bare Possibility of Falshood and Imposture, tho' we cannot shew it, is a foolish Conduct, and would in any other Case be esteem'd highly unreasonable.

Our Author indeed observes, p. 184 *. “ That
 “ God gave any Revelation any other way besides
 “ the Light of Nature, can only come under the
 “ head of Probability ; and if it be but probable
 “ that

* P. 162. 8°.

“ that God made any external Revelation at all, “ it can be but probable, tho’ perhaps not in the “ same Degree of Probability, that he made this “ or that Revelation.” But this does by no means follow. Whether God would give an extraordinary Revelation at all, might be supposed to depend on the wise Counsels of his Will upon a full view of things, the Reasons of which are often in a great measure concealed from us, and concerning which therefore we could not undertake positively to pronounce that it must be so. And though it might be probably concluded from the Consideration of God’s Goodness and Man’s Necessities, that he would at some time or other make some extraordinary Discoveries of his Will, additional to the common Light of Nature, yet such general abstracted Reasonings are easily evaded, and scarce capable of producing a satisfying Certainty. But on Supposition that God hath actually given such an extraordinary Revelation, the Proofs of it may be so circumstantiated, as to leave no room for a reasonable Doubt concerning it. Many Instances might be produced, in which the Proof of a particular Fact may be much stronger than the Probability of the Thing in general; yea in some cases we may have strong Evidence that a Thing has actually happen’d, tho’ antecedently to this Evidence we scarce could have supposed it would have happen’d. Supposing therefore that it can only come under the head of Probability, that God would at some time or other make an extraordinary Revelation of his Will to Mankind; yet when we have all the Evidence that can be reasonably desired that God hath actually given such a Revelation, this carries the Probability much further; and the Proof of the latter being founded upon Facts, is much stronger than that of the former. Yea, though antecedently to the giving such a Re-

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velation,

velation, we could not have conjectured that he would have given any; yet when such a Revelation was given, if it came attended with sufficient Proofs to make it reasonable for us to give our Assent to it, we must be bound to embrace it: and the Proof may then be said to be sufficient, when a Revelation has all the Evidences that could be reasonably desired, supposing a Revelation really given; for we must be satisfied in every Case with such Proofs as the nature of the thing requires and demands; and to refuse to give credit to it in such a case, would be a very unreasonable and unjustifiable Conduct.

It is easy to apply what has been said to the Revelation contain'd in the sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament. It contains both a clear Discovery of the main Principles of the Law of Nature, which through the Corruption of Mankind were greatly defaced and obscured, and enforces the Practice and Observance of the great Duties of that Law by Motives and Arguments of the greatest Force; we have there also a clear Discovery of the Methods which it hath pleased God in his infinite Wisdom and Goodness to take for reconciling Sinners to himself, the Terms he requires of them, and the Rewards with which he will crown their sincere though imperfect Obedience; as well as the Punishments he will inflict on the obstinately impenitent and disobedient.

This Revelation comes to us attested and confirm'd by all those Evidences and Proofs, by which we could suppose a true Revelation from God to be attested and confirm'd. The several kinds of Proofs that have been mention'd do all concur here with such a Degree of Evidence, as lays a just Foundation for a reasonable Assent. This has been often clearly shewn by those that have written on this Argument. And if it be indeed
true,

true, that God has given such a Revelation so suited to the Necessities of Mankind, we can never be sufficiently thankful for it. To reject it would be the highest Ingratitude, and Contempt of the Divine Goodness. And we ought to be upon our Guard against those that would deprive us of it, as against Persons that would rob us of our most valuable Treasure.

Our Author is one of those that hath set himself with great Art and Malignity to depreciate the Revelation contain'd in the Holy Scriptures. His Method indeed is confused, but which undoubtedly he thought properest to answer his Design. He never fairly and directly states the Arguments brought in proof of the Christian Revelation, nor gives a distinct Answer to them, though as they are common enough, and have been often urged with great Clearness and Strength, he could not be ignorant of them, or if he was, must certainly be very unfit to take upon him to write on this Argument. His chief Art and Strength lies in the Suspicions and Insinuations which he scatters throughout his Book without much Order, and which he takes care frequently to repeat, that they may make the stronger Impressions upon the Reader.

I shall endeavour in my Remarks to reduce his Objections into some Method, and shall therefore distribute them under several Heads.

He sometimes endeavours to shew, that the very Notion of a Revelation in general is inconsistent with Reason, since it supposes that we are to be govern'd by Authority, which is a renouncing our Reason.

Others of his Objections are particularly design'd against the Revelation contain'd in the sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament.

And

And these again are of several kinds. He objects against the Character of the Witnesses or first Publishers of that Revelation, and endeavours to invalidate their Testimony, and shew that it is not to be depended on. He objects against the Proof from Miracles, and endeavours to shew that these are no Proofs at all, or very uncertain ones, and which may equally serve a false Religion as the true. He objects against the Conveyance of that Revelation to us, that we can have no Certainty either of the Facts whereby that Revelation was originally attested or confirm'd, or that the Revelation itself in its Doctrines and Laws is transmitted safe to us; but rather have just grounds to suspect, considering the hands through which it has pass'd, that it has been greatly corrupted. But what he chiefly bends himself to shew is, that the Revelation itself is obscure, and of no use to guide the People to the right knowledge of God and of their Duty, but rather has a Tendency to mislead them to wrong Notions of both; and that it has many things in it contrary to Reason, and unworthy of God. Lastly, he objects against it from the want of Universality, or because it was not given to all Nations in all Ages, as he thinks a true Divine Revelation ought to be.

I shall examine these things distinctly, and shall begin with considering what he offers to shew, that to suppose a Revelation at all, by which Men are to be govern'd, is inconsistent with Reason. This is what he particularly sets himself to prove in his 12th Chapter. And the Sum of his Argument is this; That to suppose a Revelation, and that Men are to be govern'd by it, is to suppose that we are to take things upon Trust, and to be govern'd by Authority; and to take things upon Trust is to renounce our Reason; for Authority and Reason are inconsistent.

“ If

“ If you are to be govern’d by Revelation (says he) that supposes you must take every thing upon Trust, or merely because it’s said by those for whose Dictates you have an implicit Faith: for to examine into the Truth of what they say, is renouncing their Authority; as on the contrary, if Men are to be govern’d by their Reason, they are not to admit any thing further than as they see it reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take and not to take things on Trust, p. 186*.” Accordingly he declares, that “ for God himself to require us to believe any thing upon his Authority, would be to require us to renounce our Reason, and to give up our Understandings, which would be to require Impossibilities; and that all the Help any Authority whatever can afford a reasonable Being, is the offering him Arguments of which his own Reason must judge; and when he perceives their Agreement with his self-evident Notions, ’tis then and only then he can be sure of their Truth, p. 200†.” And that “ he who demands a Man’s Assent to any thing without conveying into his Mind such Reasons [*viz.* drawn from the Nature of the thing, distinct from the Authority of the Proposer] as may produce a Sense of the Truth of it, erects a Tyranny over his Understanding, and demands an impossible Tribute, p. 190‖. That nothing but Reasoning can improve Reason, and no Book can improve my Reason in any Point, but as it gives me convincing Proofs of its Reasonableness. [*viz.* Proofs drawn from the Nature of the thing itself in that very particular Point.] p. 199.

In all this the great Principle he goes upon is this, That in no Case whatever we are to trust to
Autho-

Authority; and that to believe any thing upon the Credit of another, or to make his Authority the Reason of my believing it, is a renouncing my own Reason. A Principle evidently false. A competent Authority is in many cases a good Medium, which may be safely made use of as an Argument to assure us of the Truth of a thing; and in some cases is the only Argument or Proof the thing admits of; and in such cases to refuse to be govern'd by such Authority is an unreasonable Conduct. Our Author indeed saith, p. 222 *. "That
 " in Propositions relating to such Facts as we learn
 " from Report, 'tis by our Reason alone in com-
 " paring Circumstances that we must judge of their
 " Probability." But if he allows (as he here seems to do) that we may learn or come to be assured of things by Report or Testimony, he must allow that we may come to be assured of things upon Authority; for what is knowing or believing things upon Report, but believing them upon the Authority of the Reporter? and the better his Authority is, the greater Credit we give, and the stronger Reason we have to believe him. We must not indeed receive things evidently impossible, and which are plainly contradictory to the clear Dictates of Reason, upon the Authority of any Reporter whatsoever; but we may reasonably in many Cases believe things upon Testimony, which we should not have believed without it, yea and things which at first view appear to be very unlikely, when we have good Reason to think that the Testimony we have concerning them is such as may safely be depended on; in which case our only Reason for believing them is the Authority of the Reporter, who we have reason to think is not deceived himself, nor hath an Intention to deceive us.

It

* P. 198. 8°.

It is acknowledged, that if we are govern'd by Reason, we are not to admit any thing further than we see it reasonable; that is, than we see it reasonable to admit it: but then we may often see it reasonable to admit a thing as true, upon the Credit of a sufficient Authority or competent Testimony, though we have no demonstrative Evidence of the Truth of it from the nature of the thing. And particularly supposing that there is indeed a Revelation given from God, or by Persons infallibly inspir'd and directed by him, and that we are convinced of this by sufficient Arguments, it is very reasonable to receive what is there revealed, upon the Authority of the Revealer; and indeed it is a Contradiction to believe it to be a Revelation from God, and yet refuse our Assent to it; for that would be to believe that God says it, and yet that it is not true; which would be the most absurd irrational Conduct in the world, and contrary to a first Principle or self-evident Notion, which is, that as God cannot be deceived or deceive, whatever he reveals must be true.

But he argues, p. 191 *. "That to suppose a Creature to have Reason to direct him, and that he is not to be directed by it, is a Contradiction. And if we are religious as we are rational, can Religion oblige us not to be govern'd by Reason, though but for a moment? Nay, what is the Religion of all rational Beings but what the Scripture terms it, a reasonable Service! And if God can no otherwise apply to Men but by applying to their Reason (which he is continually doing by the Light of Nature) does he not by that bid Men use their Reason? And can God at the same time forbid it, by requiring an implicit Faith in any Person whatever?"

But

But if by implicit Faith be meant (as this Author here intends it) a believing things upon the Authority of the Revealer, which we our selves could not have found out or known to be true by any Argument meerly drawn from the nature of things; I deny that to require such an implicit Faith, or to require us to believe upon such a sufficient Testimony, is to forbid us to use our Reason. I own God applies to Mens Reason, that is, he applies to them as reasonable Beings; his Revelation supposes them such; for it would be in vain to make a Revelation to Brutes. But it does not follow that because we are reasonable Beings, and are to be guided and govern'd by Reason, that therefore we need no Help or Assistance from others, but are in all cases left merely to what we our selves can discover or find out by our own Reason without any further Assistance. It may in many cases be a very great Advantage to us to receive Information from others, in Matters which otherwise we could not of our selves have known at all, or not so certainly; and if God condescends to give us Information by external Revelation, we ought both thankfully to receive it and firmly to depend upon it.

But our Author urges, that “no Man can any more discern the Objects of his own Understanding and their Relations by the Faculties of another, than he can see with another Man's Eyes; and therefore, he who demands a Man's Assent to any thing, without conveying into his Mind such Reasons as may produce a Sense of the Truth of it, erects a Tyranny over his Understanding, and demands an impossible Tribute, p. 190.” It will be easily granted, that no Man is to believe any thing without sufficient Reason to believe it; but the Question still remains, whether in many Cases there may not be Reasons for

for our Assent to the Truth of a thing, drawn from the Authority of the Proposer, as well as from the Nature of the thing? Whether it may not be very reasonable to believe a thing upon the Credit of a sufficient Testimony or Authority, which we should not have believed without such an Authority or Testimony? And whether such a Testimony may not be so circumstanced, as to be a good Reason for our believing a thing, tho' we have no other way of knowing or being assured of it? And it is very evident, and the common Sentiment of all Mankind, that it may be so. And to say, I must believe nothing upon any Testimony or Authority whatsoever, but what I myself know from the reason and nature of the thing, independently of such a Testimony, is to say, I must believe nothing upon any Testimony at all, either divine or human; a Principle contrary to the common Sense of Mankind, and which would destroy all Credit in the World, and deprive us of the greatest Part of our Knowledge, and of some of the best Helps and Advantages for Improvement. 'Tis true, *no Man can see with another's Eyes, or discern the Objects of his own Understanding by another Man's Faculties*; yet we may believe what others see and know, upon the Credit of their Testimony, tho' we ourselves have not seen it, or could not have known it without their Testimony.

When the Author argues, p. 199 *. that "no thing but Reasoning can improve Reason, and "no Book can improve my Reason in any Point, "but as it gives me convincing Proofs of its reasonableness:" What does he mean by improving Reason? Whatever enlarges our Knowledge, and informs us of things which it is useful for us to know, improves our Reason, or improves our Minds, by furnishing them with useful Knowledge.

And

And it is evident there are many things very useful to be known, and the Knowledge of which improves our Minds, which yet we know only by credible Testimony. Such are all things relating to the History of former Ages or distant Nations, many things relating to the History of Nature and experimental Philosophy, and all Facts whatsoever that we ourselves did not see; and to discard all these because depending on Authority or Testimony, would be to discard almost all our Knowledge, and under pretence of reducing us to strict Reason and Demonstration, reduce us to Barbarism. If a thing be in itself useful to be known, the Knowledge of it will be of advantage, in whatsoever way we come to be assured of it. On supposition therefore, that a Revelation is given from God to instruct us in Things which we could not have known, or not so certainly without such a Revelation, if these things be in themselves of importance to us to know, it would be very absurd to say, that the Knowledge of them is not useful or improving, merely because it comes to us by Revelation, or a Divine Testimony.

When the Author saith, that “ if we can’t believe otherwise than as Things appear to our Understandings, to suppose God requires us to give up our Understandings to any Authority whatsoever, is to suppose that he requires Impossibilities; and our self-evident Notions, being the Foundation of all Certainty, we can only judge of things as they are found more or less agreeable to them, p. 189 * :” What does he mean by this, that *we can’t believe otherwise than as things appear to our Understandings*? Does he mean that we can’t believe any thing to be true, which our Understandings clearly perceive to be false, and contrary to any self-evident Notions? This

* P. 167.

This will be easily granted. And if by God's requiring us to give up our Understandings, he means, a requiring us to renounce our Reason, and to believe upon his Authority any thing that is a plain Contradiction to self-evident Notions, it will be easily allow'd, that this wou'd be to require an Impossibility. But all this is nothing at all to the present Question, which is only, whether we may not justly believe some Things to be true upon the Authority of the Revealer, which otherwise we shou'd not have known, or not have so certainly known to be true; or whether we are not to believe any thing to be true, but what we our selves can clearly prove to be so by its own intrinsick Evidence, independently of any Authority whatsoever? If the Author had fairly stated the Question thus, (and this is his evident Meaning) the fallacy and weakness of his Argument wou'd have immediately appear'd. For to believe a thing upon the credit of a sufficient Testimony or Authority, is so far from a renouncing our Reason, or from being an Impossibility, that it is what the wisest Men in all Ages have thought it in many Cases very reasonable to do; and to assert the contrary, is most absurd and irrational. On supposition therefore, that God hath given a Revelation to Mankind, and hath there assur'd us of Things, which we cou'd not have certainly known to be true without such a Revelation, for him in such a case to require us to believe those Things upon his own Authority and Testimony, is so far from requiring an impossible Tribute, that it is requiring a plain Duty, founded in the very Reason of Things, and agreeable to our self-evident Notions; one of which is, that God cannot deceive or be deceiv'd, and that therefore, what he reveals must needs be true; and consequently, that his Authority or Testimony is a sufficient Reason

son for my Assent in Things, which I shou'd not have known without that Authority and Testimony.

But he argues, that this is to set up *two supreme independent Rules, Reason and Revelation, both of which require absolute Obedience*, p. 186*. I must own I don't well comprehend the Author's Meaning here, though he seems to have a mighty good Opinion of the Argument, and lays a great Stress upon it. He tells us himself in the beginning of his 12th Chapter, where he undertakes to explain what he means by Reason, that "by Reason, we sometimes understand the rational Faculties, as when we attribute any Operation to it, such as distinguishing between Truth and Falshood; and when we ascribe no such Operation to it, as when we give a Reason for a Thing; we then understand by it, any Medium by which our rational Faculties judge of the Agreement or Disagreement of the Terms of any Proposition," p. 180||." Now when he talks of two independent Rules, Reason and Revelation, if by Reason he understands the rational Faculties, then it is very unfair to oppose our taking in Things by Reason or our rational Faculties, and our taking in Things by Revelation; for it is by our rational Faculties that we take in Revelation, and all Evidence whatsoever, whether in a way of Authority or otherwise. But if by Reason, he means here, a Medium by which our rational Faculties judge of the Agreement or Disagreement of the Terms of any Proposition, then Revelation it self is a Medium by which we may judge of the Truth of Things. And in this Sense it is not oppos'd to Reason, but furnishes a Medium by which our rational Faculties come to be assur'd of Things, which we cou'd not have known or not have so certainly known without it.

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There are indeed several Ways, by which our rational Faculties come to be assur'd of the Truth of Things; sometimes by a self-evidencing Light; sometimes by the Testimony of our Senses, or by our own Experience; sometimes by Arguments drawn from the intrinsic Evidence and Nature of the Thing, (which is what this Writer seems particularly to mean by Reason as oppos'd to Revelation) sometimes by credible Information or Testimony, or, which is the same thing, by competent Authority: And in many Cases the one of these assists and strengthens the other. These are distinct Mediums, which our rational Faculties make use of for coming to a certainty about Things; they are distinct, but not to be oppos'd as contrary to one another; and each of 'em are sufficient in their own kind, and may furnish a good Reason for our Belief. And particularly it may be shewn, that Revelation, which is a divine Testimony, may in many Cases be of signal use.

Even with regard to some things, which absolutely speaking are capable of strict Demonstration, Revelation may be of great use to the bulk of Mankind, who are scarce capable of the Attention that is necessary to follow a Chain of abstracted Reasonings. The Authority or Testimony of God himself seems to be a shorter way, and more accommodated to the Capacity of the Vulgar, who in fact come to know most things by Authority or Testimony. Other Things there are which come recommended to us by Arguments, which tho' they carry some Probability, yet do not remove our Doubts, or give us a satisfying Certainty; and here Authority, especially a divine one, may be of great use to remove our Doubts, and to give us a satisfying Assurance of those Things which seem'd to us doubtful before. There are other Things which it may be useful to us to know,

and which yet we cannot pretend to find out of our selves, as being Things above our reach, or which depend on the free Councils of God, and the Methods which it may please him in his infinite Wisdom to take, of which in many Cases for want of having a full comprehension of Things, we are incompetent Judges; and in these Cases a divine Authority or Testimony is the only proper Medium or Argument; and our Certainty rises in proportion to the Evidence we have that it is a divine Testimony.

In none of these Cases is there any Inconsistency between Reason and Revelation. He ought not therefore to introduce his pretended Christian B as saying, "I don't think we ought to have the same regard for Reason as Men had formerly, when that was the sole Rule God had given them for the government of their Actions, p. 186*." We are still as much govern'd by right Reason as ever, with this difference, that by the advantage of Revelation we have far greater Helps for the improvement of our Knowledge, than otherwise we shou'd have had. Supposing the Revelation we enjoy to be in no case contradictory to the clear and evident Dictates of Reason, and we challenge our Author to prove that it is so, and that in many Cases it makes a discovery of things of Importance to us to know, and which yet we cou'd not have known or not so certainly without it; then it is of signal use to direct, to assist, and improve our rational Faculties, and to enlarge our Knowledge. In this view there is a manifest Harmony and plain Consistency between Reason and Revelation.

There is another Argument which our Author brings in his 12th Chapter against the Authority of Revelation in general; and that is, from the necessity

* P. 164.

necessity of a previous Examination. He takes a great deal of pains to prove, that we must not receive any Revelation without examining into the Truth of that Revelation; and then he endeavours to shew, that this Examination, which is suppos'd to be previously necessary to our receiving any Revelation as from God, is absolutely inconsistent with the pretended Authority of that Revelation. To this purpose he tells us, that "it is our Duty, before we embrace any instituted Religion, to examine by the Light which God hath given us into every part of it, and after a scrupulous Trial pass Sentence upon it, p. 219*." And that "before examining what Men teach, there is no reason to have an implicit Faith in one Set of Men more than another; and Examination destroys all implicit Faith, and all Authority whatsoever, since if they then embrace the Opinions of others, whether Apostles or not, 'tis because they appear agreeable to their Reason, p. 210, 211†." And it must be own'd, that the Examination which our Author supposes to be necessary, wou'd effectually destroy all Authority. For it appears from several Passages in his 12th Chapter, that he wou'd have us in examining into the Truth of Revelation, to have no regard to Miracles, or any external Attestations whatsoever. We are to consider nothing but the internal Marks, *by which only* (he tells us) *the Truth of all Religion is to be tried*, p. 193‖. And these internal Marks must be so fix'd to every part of the Revelation, that we may be able from thence to demonstrate every particular Doctrine of Revelation to be true, independently of any Authority whatsoever. Thus he supposes, that in examining into the Truth of any Revelation, and before we can come to an Assurance that it comes from God, we must be able

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* P. 196.

† P. 187.

‖ P. 170.

to demonstrate by Arguments drawn from the very nature of the Thing, that each particular Doctrine is true, not only possible or probable, but actually and certainly true: and this leaves no room for believing any thing on the credit of Revelation at all; for every body will easily grant, that what we antecedently know to be true by an intrinsic Evidence from the nature of the Thing, we need no Authority to assure us of. All this goes upon the Principle already mention'd, that we are never to receive any thing as true, but what we our selves know to be so, by Arguments drawn from the Nature of the Thing, and that we are to believe nothing at all upon any Testimony or Authority whatsoever; the Absurdity of which has already been sufficiently expos'd.

I freely own, that we are to examine a Religion before we admit it; but then in examining, whether a Revelation comes from God, we ought to consider all the Evidences and Proofs brought for it, whether internal or external, and then pronounce upon the whole Evidence. And to discard all the external Attestations at once, as if no regard was to be had to them at all in such an Enquiry, is after all this Author's boasted Pretences, to institute a very defective and partial Examination.

It is very proper, indeed, in examining into the Truth or Divinity of any Revelation pretending to come from God, to consider the Nature and Tendency of its Doctrines and Precepts; for if they be plainly contradictory to our self-evident Notions or the clearest Dictates of sound Reason, or if they be manifestly subversive of Morality and Righteousness, they are not to be admitted. But then, it is not necessary that we be able distinctly to demonstrate concerning every particular Doctrine it contains, that it must certainly or necessarily be true, by Arguments drawn from the Na-

ture of the Thing. It is sufficient, if upon Examination we find that its Doctrines and Precepts are, if believ'd and obey'd, of a good Tendency. And though there may be some Things in them which we cou'd not have known without that Revelation, or which have great Difficulties attending them, that we are not well able to account for, but which at the same time we cannot demonstrate to be impossible; (and this may be justly expected in a Revelation that is design'd, amongst other Things, to inform us of the Nature and the wonderful Counsels of the Deity; Things very remote from our Apprehension :) This alone is not a just Reason for our rejecting that Revelation, if it be otherwise confirm'd with sufficient Attestations. For in many Cases it is counted very reasonable to believe a Thing to be true, when it comes to us confirm'd by a sufficient Testimony or Authority that we think we can depend upon, which otherwise we shou'd not have believ'd, or perhaps have esteem'd very improbable.

It is far from being true which our Author so positively asserts, that *Examination destroys all Authority whatsoever*; on the contrary, a just Examination into the Proofs and Evidences of a divine Revelation, supposing them to be such as shew it to be of a divine Original, is so far from destroying the Authority of it, that it establishes it, and makes it reasonable for us to submit to its Authority. For to believe a Revelation to come from God, and yet not to receive any thing upon the Credit or Authority of it, is an inconsistent Conduct. So that in many Cases Examination strengthens Authority, as an examining into the Character and Credit of a Witness may strengthen his Testimony, and make it reasonable for us to believe him, or to receive what he testifies upon the credit of his Testimony. And to say, that we will not believe any Witnesses, except we know before-

hand by other Arguments, that what he says is actually true, is to destroy all Use of Testimony; and the Man that should talk thus in any Court of Judicature, wou'd but expose himself to just Ridicule. Supposing therefore, that upon examination we find Reason to believe that the Apostles were extraordinarily sent from God, infallibly inspir'd to instruct the World in Things which it is of great importance to Mankind to know, to believe this, and yet not receive any thing upon their Testimony or the Credit of their Authority, wou'd be a most absurd and unreasonable Conduct. I may find upon examination, that the Doctrines they teach, have nothing in them contradictory to any clear Principles of Reason, nothing but what, supposing it true, is of a good tendency, but this alone does not shew those Doctrines to be true; it only shews they may be true if confirm'd by proper Evidence, and then the illustrious Attestations whereby they stand confirm'd, demonstrate them to be actually true, and make it reasonable for me to receive them as such.

The Author represents it as an *odd Jumble to prove the Truth of a Book by the Truth of the Doctrines it contains, and at the same time conclude those Doctrines to be true, because contain'd in that Book*, p. 186*. But he must not pretend to put such a Jumble as this (which he alone is chargeable with) upon the Advocates for Revelation: as if they undertook to prove the Truth of the Scripture, by shewing that every particular Doctrine it contains may be demonstrated to be true, by Arguments drawn from the nature of the Thing, independently of Scripture-Testimony; and yet at the same time pretended to believe those Doctrines only upon that Testimony. No, they find indeed upon examining the Doctrines of Scripture, that they are of an excellent Tendency, and that

* P. 164.

that there is nothing in them subversive of the Obligations of Morality, or which can be demonstrated to be contrary to any evident Principles of Reason; but this alone does not prove them to be actually and necessarily true. Many of the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity relate to Things which depend on the free and most wise Determinations of the divine Will; the wonderful methods of his Wisdom and Grace towards his sinful Creatures; now though upon Examination we find nothing in them but what appear to us to be agreeable to the divine Wisdom and Goodness, yet there is nothing in the nature of Things from which we could certainly demonstrate that these Things must be so. We are in many Cases very improper and incompetent Judges of the Measures that it may seem fit to infinite Wisdom to take. The Reasons of the divine Counsels are things above our reach. But when we find that the Persons professing to be sent from God with a Revelation of his Will in these Matters, produce the most illustrious Proofs of their divine Mission, then we receive those things as actually true, which before we could only regard as possible and of a good Tendency.

I need not take much notice of our Author's long Declamation in his 12th Chapter against implicit Faith. He produces with great Pomp many Testimonies of Protestant Writers, to shew the absurdity of giving up our Reason to Authority. And it will be own'd, that to believe any Authority without examining into the grounds of that Authority, or to believe manifest Impossibilities and Contradictions upon any pretended Authority whatsoever, is an unwarrantable giving up our Understandings. And this is that implicit Faith which the Protestant Writers whom he cites justly condemn. But they were never so absurd as to put all Authority

on the same foot, or to assert that we are never to receive any thing as true upon any Authority whatsoever. Yet this is what this Writer means by implicit Faith. To believe any thing whatsoever upon Authority or Testimony, so as to make that Authority or Testimony the reason of our believing it, or to depend upon the credit of any Persons whatsoever, even in Things which we have no way of knowing but by Testimony, is with him to believe implicitly; let their Authority be ever so well founded. But this is only to give a hard Name to a thing which is evidently very reasonable. If to believe on a sufficient Authority or Testimony be implicit Faith, it is what Reason it self directs to in many Cases; and there cannot be a plainer proof of the miserable Shifts the enemies of Revelation are reduc'd to, than that they cannot argue against it on any other Principles, than such as would banish all Faith and Credit out of the World; so that if they will be consistent with themselves, they must believe nothing but what they have seen with their own Eyes, and the Certainty of which they can demonstrate by intrinsic Evidences drawn from the Nature of the Thing; they must reject all Accounts of Countries, Persons and Things which they themselves were not witnesses of; in a word, they must discard all use of any Testimony or Authority whatsoever; and yet by the Laws of all Nations, and the common Consent of Mankind, Testimony or Authority is in many Cases to be depended on, and is look'd upon as a sufficient reason for believing Things.

There cannot be a greater Imposition upon his Readers, than to pretend that the implicit Faith which the Protestant Writers condemn, is the same which he thinks fit to represent under that Notion. He tells us indeed, that what he offers against implicit

implicit Faith, &c. is in defence of the Protestant Religion, and the whole Current of Scripture, p. 212*.

And yet he that has the confidence to pretend this, does not stick to declare, that *the reasoning of the Protestant Writers strikes equally at all implicit Faith, in St. Peter as well as his Successors.* An admirable way this the Author takes of defending the Protestant Religion, by representing it as an inconsistent self-confounding Scheme, and of defending the Scriptures by putting their Authority on the same foot with the Decrees of Popes! But this is not the only place where he thinks fit to set Popery and Christianity on the same Foundation, as if they were to stand or fall together. But for my part, I can see no consequence in this at all, that because the Protestant Writers argue against swallowing Doctrines on a false pretence of Authority, which are contradictory to the most evident Principles of Sense and Reason, therefore they must be against believing any thing at all (even in Matters which cannot be prov'd to be contrary to any evident Principle of Reason) upon any Testimony or Authority, how credible soever. Whilst we believe there are good Proofs, that *Peter* and the other Apostles were sent by God in an extraordinary manner, to bring a Revelation of his Will, and produc'd sufficient Credentials of their divine Mission; and that the Authority of their pretended Successors is destitute of sufficient Proof, yea that there are the strongest Proofs to the contrary; whilst we believe this (and he has offer'd nothing to induce us to believe the contrary) he must give us leave to put a difference between the one and the other, and to suppose that the Authority of the one may be depended on, and the other not; except he will also condescend to prove, that all Authority and
Testimony

Testimony, of what kind soever, whether well founded or not, is alike to be rejected without further Examination; and that no Regard is to be had to a good Authority any more than to a pretended one, and that a true Testimony is no more to be depended on than a false one. A most absurd Principle, which this Author indeed seems frequently to suppose, but never offers to prove, any further than by calling all believing on Authority implicit Faith, and a giving up or renouncing our Reason, which is to take that for granted which is the very Point in question.



CHAP. II.

The Author's Objections against the Character of the Witnesses or first Publishers of the Jewish and Christian Revelation consider'd; and it is shewn that we have the highest Assurance we can reasonably desire, that they neither were imposed upon themselves, nor had a Design to impose upon others, nor indeed, as things were circumstanced, had it in their Power to do so.

HAVING removed the general Prejudices which the Author lays in the way of all Revelation, I now proceed to examine the particular Objections he advances against the Truth and Certainty of the Revelation contain'd in the sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament. And I shall begin with considering what he offers against the Character of the Witnesses or first Publishers of that Revelation, with a view to shew, that they are not to be depended on.

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To this purpose, he first observes in general, p. 243 *, that “ we ought to be certain that the
“ first Propagators of a traditional Religion could
“ not be imposed on themselves, or would not
“ impose on others; or in other words, were in-
“ fallible and impeccable. As to the first, he ob-
“ serves, that Numbers have taken their own Re-
“ veries for Divine Inspirations; and that evil
“ Beings can impress Notions in Mens Minds as
“ strongly as good Beings, and can cause Miracles
“ to be done in confirmation of them; that there-
“ fore there is no way to know to which of the
“ two, Notions thus impress’d are owing, but
“ from their Nature and Tendency; or those in-
“ ternal Marks of Wisdom and Goodness, by
“ which they plainly shew themselves to be Parts
“ of natural Religion.” He adds, that “ ’tis not
“ enough to be certain these Men were not im-
“ posed on; we must be as certain they would on
“ no occasion whatever impose on others; or, in
“ other words, were not Men of like Passions and
“ Infirmities with other Mortals.”

That notwithstanding what our Author here of-
fers, those to whom God communicates his Will
in a way of immediate Inspiration, may have a
Certainty that they themselves are not imposed on;
and that the Revelation they deliver in his Name,
may come attended with such Evidences and At-
testations, that others may have a sufficient Affu-
rance that God hath extraordinarily sent and in-
spired them, hath been already shewn, p. 2, &
seq. But it is a most unreasonable Demand which
this Writer here makes, that except Men be in all
things both infallible and impeccable, and abso-
lutely raised above all the Passions and Infirmities
of human Nature, they can’t be depended on in any
thing. A Principle which, if once admitted,
would

* P. 218, 219.

would destroy all Faith and Credit among Men. Though it implies no Contradiction, that Men should deceive or be deceived, yet it cannot be denied, that many Cases may happen so circumstanced, that we may have the greatest Reason to be assured, that they neither are imposed upon themselves in what they deliver, nor have any Design to impose upon others; and in such Cases it would be a very unreasonable thing not to give Credit to them. And it carries this still further, if the Things they testify, and the Proofs they appeal to for the Confirmation of their Testimony, be of such a nature, and so circumstanced, that they could not impose them upon the World if they were not true, tho' they should be ever so willing to do so. Let us apply this to the *first Propagators* of the *Jewish* and *Christian* Revelation.

That *Moses* was not imposed upon himself, nor took his own Reveries for Divine Inspirations, admits of as full a Proof as can reasonably be desired. Whatever it might be supposed a warm Imagination might do, as to making him believe that he had a secret Communication with the Deity, yet certainly Fancy alone could never have enabled him to perform a Series of such astonishing Works, visibly transcending all human Power. These are plain Proofs there was more than Fancy and Enthusiasm in his Case, and that he was really assisted by a supernatural Power. As to the Author's Pretences, that this might possibly be by the Interposition of evil Beings, this shall be fully consider'd afterwards, when I come to examine the Proof from Miracles.

And as we have the strongest Evidence to convince us, that *Moses* was not imposed upon himself by the Warmth of his own Imagination, so we have all the Assurance that can reasonably be desired, that he had no Intention to impose upon others;

others; that is, that as he was not a mere Enthusiast, so neither was he an Impostor. He was, indeed, one of consummate Wisdom, (renown'd for it even amongst the Heathens) but there is nothing tricking or designing in his Character or Conduct, but every where a noble undisguis'd Simplicity. He made no use of the great Authority he had, to serve the Ends of his own Avarice or Ambition. Though he had Children of his own, he left them without Dignities or any extraordinary Measure of Wealth, to continue undistinguish'd amongst the common *Levites*. Indeed, any one that considers that ardent Love to God, that Zeal for his Glory, that Veneration for the Divine Majesty, that unaffected Probity and Simplicity that appears in the whole of his Conduct, cannot but conceive a very high Esteem for so excellent a Person. If any Man would form a just Notion of *Moses* and his Law, let him read the Book of *Deuteronomy*. There is nothing that comes near it in all the Law-givers of Antiquity. No Father ever shew'd a tenderer Concern for the Good of his Children, than he does for the Welfare of the People committed to his Care. Never was any thing equal to the Pathos and the Force of his Exhortations, the tender and affectionate Manner, and yet the Solemnity and Dignity with which they are delivered. He here forms his own amiable and venerable Character, impossible to be counterfeited; his whole Heart and Soul is laid open; the Prophet, the Law-giver, the Father of his People wonderfully appears; and the manifest Design and Tendency of the whole is to advance the Honour of God and his pure Worship, in opposition to all Idolatry, and to instruct and ingage the People in the Practice of universal Righteousness.

But that which deserves chiefly to be consider'd on this Occasion is, that he took a Method quite contrary

contrary to what he would have done if he had been a cunning artful Impostor, that wanted to put his own Inventions upon the People for Divine Laws. If he had only pretended to some secret Communications with the Deity, the Credit of which rested intirely on his own word, there might have been some Pretence for suspecting an Imposture. It might have been said, that he only feign'd such an Intercourse with the Deity, to give the greater Authority to his Laws; as *Numa* feign'd his Conferences with the Goddess *Egeria*, and *Mahomet* his Journey to Heaven; for which there was no Evidence but his own Word. But this was not the Method *Moses* took. The People had not merely his own word for his receiving the Law from God, they had the most uncontested Proofs of it that could possibly be supposed, in a Series of the most astonishing Works that had all the Evidences of a Divine Power. *Moses* appeal'd for the Authority of his Laws, to plain and evident Facts, of which that whole vast Multitude were Eye-witnesses. And his taking this Method plainly shews, that he had no Design to impose upon the People. All was open, fair, and undisguised; since the Facts to which he appeal'd, as Proofs of his divine Mission and Authority, were of such a nature, that they could not possibly have been imposed upon the People if they had not been true. Could they possibly have been persuaded, if the Fact had not been so, that they were brought out of *Egypt* with a Series of the most astonishing Miracles wrought for their Deliverance; that they were carried safe through the Red Sea as on dry Land, whilst the *Egyptians* pursuing them were overwhelm'd in the Waves; that they themselves heard the Law pronounced with the most amazing Solemnity, from the Top of Mount *Sinai*, amidst the most awful Thunders and Lightnings; that they

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they saw the Rock smitten, and Waters gushed forth in the Wilderness like a River, of which that vast Multitude drank, they and their Cattle; that they were fed with Manna from Heaven for forty Years together, which constantly fell six days in the Week, and intermitted the seventh, &c? To suppose that the whole Nation of the *Israelites*, however stupid we imagine them to be, could be made to believe that they heard and saw all these things when they did not, is the most extravagant Thought that ever enter'd into the Heart of Man; and any Man that is capable of seriously admitting such a Supposition, is not fit to be reason'd with any longer.

What has been observed concerning *Moses*, may be equally applied to the first Propagators of the Christian Revelation. We have the highest Assurance that can reasonably be desired, that they were neither imposed upon themselves, nor had an Intention to impose on others; yea, the Things they testified, and the Proofs they appeal'd to were of such a nature, that as they were circumstanced, they could not have imposed them upon the World if they had not been true.

As to our Saviour himself, the great Author of the Christian Religion, there is not the least Shadow of Pretence for supposing that he was imposed upon himself by the Warmth of his own Imagination; or, in other words, that he was a mere Enthusiast or Visionary, that took his own Fancies for Divine Inspirations. He appears, from the Account given us of his sacred Life, to have been calm and sedate, not fir'd by an intemperate enthusiastick Heat; the most consummate and regular Train of judicious Thought runs through his admirable Discourses, and a calm Prudence reign'd in his Department. He declar'd indeed that he was extraordinarily sent of God, and that he had the

Power of performing the most illustrious Miracles in Confirmation of his Mission: This was no Dream or Illusion of his own Fancy; for he accordingly did things above the Power of Man to perform. There is no room therefore for charging this on the Reveries of his own Imagination. And there is as little Pretence for supposing that he had a Design to impose upon others, or to put a solemn Cheat upon Mankind, as there is for imagining that he himself was imposed on. An unblemish'd Purity and Sanctity of Manners, an ardent Love to God and Zeal for his Honour, and for the Interests of pure and undefiled Religion, and a disinterested Love and Benevolence towards Mankind, appear'd in his whole Conduct. He profess'd himself to be the promised Messiah, but not such as flatter'd the Imaginations of the Jews, but the Author of a pure and spiritual Salvation, one that was sent to save Men from their Sins; and his whole Conduct was as became that Character. He himself gave the most perfect Pattern of Humility, Meekness and Condescension; nor was there any thing that he ever more strictly forbid, or more severely rebuk'd among his Disciples, than a Spirit of Domination, and Contention who should be greatest. He never used any insinuating Arts to ingratiate with the Rich and Great, or to captivate the Favour of the People, but with an impartial and godlike Severity rebuk'd the reigning Sins, as well as contradicted the darling Prejudices of the Age and Nation in which he lived. He did not propose any worldly Advantages to his Followers. Self-denial or the Mortification of their corrupt Appetites and Passions, was what he insisted on as the essential Condition of their Discipleship. He prepared them to expect Persecution, Obloquy, and Reproach, in this World; and the Rewards he promised, were not such as are apt to work on

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the Generality of Mankind, but of a spiritual Nature, arising from the Testimony of a good Conscience, a Sense of the Divine Love and Favour here, and the Perfection of Holiness and Happiness in the Vision and Enjoyment of the Deity in a future State. In a word, there was nothing either in his own Temper or Conduct, or in the Scheme of Religion he introduced, that had the least Marks of Sensuality, Avarice, or Ambition, or of any base selfish Views, or of the Maxims and Subtleties of a worldly Policy; so that it may be justly affirm'd, that there never was a Character in the World more remote from that of an Impostor than his.

It strengthens all this, when it is further consider'd, that he put the Proof of his Divine Mission upon Miracles, of which all the People were Witnesses, and which were perform'd in the most open and publick manner, in the View of his Enemies themselves; and which is more, he put the Proof of the whole upon his own Resurrection from the Dead, a thing in which it was impossible for him to have succeeded if he had been an Impostor. For whatever Arts he might be supposed to make use of in his Life-time, they must all have died with him; the Fascination must have been dissolved at his Death. If he had the Cunning to impose on his Disciples, whilst he was alive with them, it was impossible for him, when he was dead, to have imposed his own Resurrection upon them, if it had not been true. And his laying the Stress of all on this Proof, in which it was not in his power to deceive them, plainly shews, that he had no Design to impose upon them at all.

As to his Apostles, the highest Character they pretended to, was that of his Disciples and Followers, sent by him to preach in his Name, and testify what they themselves had seen and heard. And

that they were not imposed upon themselves in what they delivered concerning the Miracles of *Jefus*, and his Resurrection from the Dead, we have the highest Assurance; because these were Facts, for which they had the concurrent Testimony of all their Senses. *What they heard, what they beheld with their Eyes, and what their Hands had handled of the Word of Life, that they testify'd*, as the Apostle *John* speaks, 1 *Job.* 1. 1, 3. They must therefore know, whether the Facts they deliver'd were true or not. This was a Matter in which they could not be deceived themselves, except we suppose them to have been in a perpetual Dream and Illusion, both in our Saviour's Lifetime and at his Death; a most extravagant Supposition, and which, if it be once admitted, 'tis impossible for us to be sure of any thing we hear or see, or to believe any Testimony whatsoever.

And as we have the highest Assurance, that the Apostles were not imposed upon themselves in what they testify'd to the World, so we have all the reason that can be to think they had no Intention to impose upon others, or to put a deliberate known Cheat upon Mankind. In them we may observe all those Characters of an undesigning Probity and Simplicity, Zeal for the Honour of God and the Good of Mankind, and a Love to Truth and Virtue; which when they concur in any Persons, we think we may depend upon their Veracity. All that they seem'd solicitous about, was to recover Mankind from their Idolatry, Vice, and Wickedness, to the right Knowledge, and Love, and Adoration of the Deity; to ingage them to a Life of Purity, Righteousness, and Charity; to shew them the Way of Salvation, and raise their Hopes and Views above this vain World, to Things invisible and eternal; and if they could but obtain this, they had their Desire, though they them-

selves were treated as the Off-scouring of all things, and exposed to the most grievous Sufferings in prosecution of so glorious a Design. Can this possibly be reconciled to the Supposition of their being Impostors, that design'd to put a Cheat upon Mankind? They did not preach themselves, but *Christ Jesus* the Lord. All that they pretended to, was to publish his Religion to the World; and they ascrib'd all the Works they did, not to any Virtue of their own, but to a Power derived from him. Now it is inconceivable what Temptation they could have to do this, if they themselves had not been persuaded of the Truth of what they testified; especially, since they very well knew, that they exposed themselves by it, to the Hatred, Reproach, and Opposition, both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and to the most grievous Sufferings, and even Death itself. Soon after the Crucifixion of *Jesus*, when they were punish'd for preaching, *they departed from the Presence of the Jewish Rulers, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer Shame for his Name*, Acts 5. 40, 41. Whence could this proceed? Why should they rejoice in suffering for one who they knew had deceived them; which must have been the case, if he had not risen from the Dead, as he promised and foretold? Whence that wonderful Love to him, and Veneration for his Name, whom they must then regard as an Impostor? There have been Instances of Persons that have died for false Religions, but then they themselves believed them to be true. But to suppose that the Apostles should go through all the World preaching Salvation through a crucified *Jesus*, and thereby subvert their own pleasing Expectations of a temporal *Messiah*, with which the *Jews* were so highly delighted; that they should, without any imaginable Temptation to do so, testify at the hazard of their Lives, and all that is dear to Men,

that they saw him risen from the Dead, if at the same time they knew he was not risen; that they should with an unparallel'd Constancy, and even with a surprising Alacrity and Exultation of Soul, go through a Course of the greatest Sufferings, and lay down their Lives in Confirmation of what they themselves knew to be a Lye, and at the same time hope to be gloriously rewarded for it in a future World; this is so very unaccountable in all its Circumstances, that it is much to be question'd, whether human Nature, with all the Extravagancies to which it is subject, is capable of it.

As a further Confirmation of their own Divine Mission, and the Testimony they gave concerning *Jesus* and his Resurrection, they appeal'd to the glorious Miracles, Works visibly transcending all human Power, which they were impower'd to do in the Name of a risen *Jesus*, and by a Virtue derived from him. If, indeed, they had appeal'd to Wonders which no-body knew but themselves, or to things done only before a few of their own Associates, and the Credit of which rested only upon their Words, there might be some Grounds for Suspicion; but when they appeal'd to Facts of so extraordinary a Nature, done publickly in the View of Thousands, and even of their most prejudiced Enemies, it is the strongest Proof imaginable of their Sincerity, and at the same time furnishes a convincing Argument, that they were not imposed upon themselves by the Warmth of an enthusiastick Imagination; for this alone could never have enabled them to perform such astonishing Works. They thought themselves supernaturally assisted, and it appear'd in fact that they were so; for they could not have done what they did, without the Assistance of superior Beings; and that these were not evil ones, we have the strongest Assurance that can be desir'd, as I shall afterwards shew.

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Let us now examine what our Author offers to invalidate the Testimony of the first Propagators of the *Jewish* or *Christian* Revelation. He observes, that "it is not enough to be certain these
" Men were not imposed on, we must be as certain
" they would on no occasion whatever impose on
" others; or, in other words, were not Men of
" like Passions and Infirmities with other Mortals:" or, as he had express'd it a little before, they must be not only *infallible*, but *impeccable*. He then proceeds to give a Catalogue of the Faults of inspired Men recorded in Scripture, and concludes his Account thus: "Do not these Instances, tho'
" many more might be added, plainly shew that
" inspir'd Persons, whether Prophets or Apostles,
" are subject to the same Passions, even to dissembling and lying, as other Men? and that we
" sin against that Reason which was given us to
" distinguish between Religion and Superstition,
" if we do not by it examine all Doctrines whatsoever, and by whomsoever delivered?" p. 243, 245*.

I would observe, first, that the Author here puts a very unfair State of the Case, when he represents it as if we had no other Evidence of the Truth of the Scripture-Revelation, but the Word of those who were the first Propagators of it. We do not depend merely on their own Word that they had a Revelation from God, but on Proofs independent on this, on the Miracles they wrought, and other illustrious Attestations, which were of such a nature, that it was not in their power to have imposed them upon the World for real publick Facts, if they had not been so.

Another Remark I would make upon the Author's Reasoning here, is, that it proceeds upon a Principle, in which he has the Sense of all Man-

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* P. 219, 221.

kind against him : and that is, That we are to depend on no Man's Veracity; except he be absolutely incapable of finning, and raised above the Condition of the human Nature; or, in other words, that no Man's Honesty can be depended on, nor can we trust any Man's Word or Oath in any matter whatsoever; a Principle that would produce the utmost Confusion, and utterly destroy all Credit amongst Men. For he requires, that before we believe them, we must be sure that on *no Occasion whatsoever they would impose on others; or, in other Words, were not Men of like Passions and Infirmities with other Mortals.* A most unreasonable Demand! For I hope Truth is not so far banish'd from amongst Men, but that there are many, who though they be not absolutely exempted from the Frailties and Infirmities of human Nature, yet are incapable of carrying on a deliberate known Villainy and Imposture. Or if we suppose concerning Persons, of whom otherwise we have a good Opinion, that they might possibly be tempted to impose upon others, where they had great Prospects of Gain or worldly Advantages to induce them to do so; yet it would not follow, that they might not be depended on in a Case where they had no Temptations of Interest to draw them aside, but on the contrary, all their Interests and worldly Advantages lay the other way.

With respect to the Catalogue he gives us of the Faults of inspired Men, I would observe first, that most of the Instances he produces are not at all to his purpose. In order to answer his Design, he ought to shew, that the first Propagators of the *Jewish* and *Christian* Revelation were Men of crafty Designs, capable of cool deliberate Villainy, and of putting the most solemn Cheat upon Mankind; but instead of this, all that his Instances prove, is, that even good Men may sometimes be overcome
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Christianity as Old as the Creation. 41

by strong Temptations, or carried through Fear, or the Violence of Passion, to do wrong things. If God makes use of Men in communicating the Revelations he thinks fit to give, it may be expected that they should be of like Passions with others, that is, not Rogues and Cheats, (which seems to be the Meaning the Author puts upon this Phrase, as if all Mankind were downright determin'd Knaves and Villains) but not absolutely rais'd above all the Frailties and Weaknesses of the human Nature. All that can be reasonably expected in such a Case, is, that he should infallibly guide them in what they deliver in his Name; but not that he should by a perpetual Miracle preserve them through the whole Course of their Lives from ever doing a wrong thing; which would be to abridge them of the Liberty belonging to them as moral Agents. But though they should fall thro' human Frailty into some Sins and Faults, which is all that his Instances prove, this is by no means sufficient to support the Charge of deliberate Lying and Imposture. Do not we daily see Persons, that in other Instances are guilty of many Faults through the Violence of their Passions, who yet would scorn a base thing, or to carry on a calm Villainy, and impose what they knew to be a gross Cheat upon Mankind? Indeed some of the things which he mentions as Crimes, are of such a nature, that I don't see how he could consistently find fault with them at all. Such is *Abraham's* prevaricating, in calling *Sarah* his Sister, when he was in fear of being murder'd if he own'd her for his Wife; and *David's* telling a Falshood to *Abimelech*, when he was in very great Distress, ready to perish for Want, and in danger of being pursued and overtaken by *Saul*. 'Tis evident that this Writer allows Men to utter Falshoods on far less urgent Occasions than this, (as has been shewn in the first Part, p. 200, & seq.) but

but though he thinks this to be lawful, yet I don't suppose he would allow it to be lawful to carry on a deliberate Imposture, and ingage in a form'd Design to impose the grossest Cheat and Falshood upon the World, in the Name of God himself; and therefore it does not follow, this Author himself being Judge, that because a Man may do the former (which he thinks very lawful) therefore he is capable of the latter too, which undoubtedly he would regard as a settled Villainy.

Another Remark I would make upon the Instances here alledg'd by our Author is, that when he is making a Catalogue of the Faults of inspired Persons, in order to destroy their Credit, he has not been able to alledge any thing against *Moses*; and yet it is plain, that if his Credit stands good, the Authority of the Jewish Revelation is establish'd. Nor indeed do the Instances he produces concern any of the inspir'd Writers of the Old Testament, but *David* and *Solomon*; neither of which were properly the Authors of the Jewish Religion, which was establish'd long before. *David* was guilty of some great Faults; but he was also a Man that had very eminent Virtues and noble Qualities. No where do there appear greater Tokens of a deep and sincere Repentance, than in his Writings; they are full of admirable strains of Piety, in which we may see the workings of his Soul without Disguise, his Love to God, his Zeal for his Glory, his Admiration of the divine Perfections, his Detestation of Idolatry and Wickedness. And how can it be proved, that it was inconsistent with the Wisdom of God, to assist such a Man in an extraordinary manner in his divine Comlosures, and make use of him to foretel the *Messiah* and his Benefits, who was to proceed from his Family? As to *Solomon*, his Writings are also full of admirable Morals and useful

Instructions ; he was both a very wise Man, and one that for a considerable time adher'd to the true Worship of God and the Purity of Religion ; his falling off afterwards through an immoderate Passion for Women (which this Author mentions against him) does not prove, that God might not extraordinarily assist him in the Writings which he compos'd for the instruction of the Church, before he fell into that Corruption and Idolatry, or after he recover'd from it.

As to the Writers of the New Testament, our Author seems very willing to say something to the prejudice of their Characters. He observes, that all the Apostles *fled and deserted Christ*, and *the chief of them forswore him*, and was afterwards, *as well as Barnabas, guilty of a mean piece of Dissimulation*, Gal. 2. 13. He then mentions *the sharp Contention between Paul and Barnabas, about a very indifferent Matter* ; and lastly takes notice of the account St. Paul gives of himself, Rom. 7. 19, 23. which this Author would have pass for a Confession that he was a very wicked Man, p. 245.*

These Instances shew how industrious he is to advance something against the Credit of the Apostles and inspir'd Writers of the New Testament, and at the same time how little he is able to produce that is really to the purpose.

The Apostles Timorousness in forsaking Christ at his Death, gives great Strength to their Testimony ; as it plainly shews that if Christ had continued in the Grave, and thereby disappointed their Hopes, they would not afterwards have expos'd themselves to the most grievous Sufferings, and to Death it self for his sake. 'Tis plain that whilst Christ himself was with them, and even when they believ'd he was the *Messiah*, and hoped he would raise them to great Advantages, they did not manifest

* P. 220, 221.

nifest either any great Courage, or a very forward Credulity ; and therefore when he was once crucified, if he had not risen from the Dead, as he foretold, there would have been an end of the whole Affair. They would have given up all their Hopes, and never have expos'd themselves to the most grievous Persecutions for one who they knew had deceiv'd them. *Peter* denied Christ at his Death. But whence came there afterwards so sudden an Alteration in his Conduct, that in opposition to all Fears and Dangers, he boldly preach'd in the name of *Jesus* that had been crucified, and that to the Faces of the chief Rulers of the Jews, and notwithstanding all their Threatnings? To what could this be ascrib'd; but to the irresistible Evidence he had that Christ was risen from the Dead, and to that divine Power which both strengthen'd him with a wonderful Fortitude, and enabled him to perform such illustrious Miracles? As to his *mean Dissimulation*, as the Author calls it, with *Barnabas*, it shew'd indeed a want of that Steadiness and Courage that became him on that Occasion: but it was a quite different thing from a deliberate Imposture. It was only a withdrawing himself from his Familiarity with the Gentiles for fear of offending the believing Jews, which was undoubtedly a Weakness and an Instance of Frailty, for which he was justly reprov'd by the Apostle *Paul*. It may be concluded from this and other Instances, that *Peter* was not naturally a Man of great Courage and Steadiness, and therefore the wonderful Fortitude he manifested in bearing Testimony to the Resurrection of *Jesus*, and to his Faith and Doctrine, and at length sealing that Testimony with his Blood, both shews that he was fully persuaded of the Truth of what he testified, and that he was in an extraordinary manner assisted and animated from

from above in the great Work of propagating the Gospel.

I can't well see what could be the Author's Design in mentioning the *sharp Contention between Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15. 39.* Paul's contending with *Barnabas*, and his reproving *Peter*, shew'd his Impartiality and the Fervency of his Zeal, and how far he was from flattering any Persons whatsoever; and these Contentions among the Disciples shew'd that they did not act in concert in putting a Cheat upon Mankind. If it had been an Imposture meerly concerted among themselves, such Contentions would soon have broken the Combination; but far from this, none of their Contentions among themselves ever in the least diminish'd their Regard to the Lord *Jesus*, or their Zeal for his Honour, or made them less assiduous in preaching his Gospel; a plain Proof that in this they acted from a full Conviction and Evidence.

This particularly must have been the Case of the Apostle *Paul*, whose Testimony is so remarkable, that it deserves to be distinctly insisted on; especially as he was the most eminent Instrument in propagating the Christian Faith through the most distant Nations, and was the Penman of a considerable Part of the Sacred Writings of the New Testament. He was a Person of great Sense and Learning, and on all accounts the most unlikely Person in the World to be impos'd upon in favour of Christianity. Never was there any Man more strongly prejudic'd against it than he. He was so active and assiduous in endeavouring to suppress it, and in persecuting the Professors of it, that it procur'd him the Favour and Confidence of the High Priest and the Chief of the Jews. Yet on a sudden this obstinate Persecutor became a Disciple and an Apostle of that *Jesus* whom he blasphem'd before; and with an unshaken Constancy,

stancy, and a Zeal and Diligence that cannot be sufficiently admir'd, he preach'd the Gospel of Christ in Opposition to a thousand Dangers, Whence came this so sudden and marvellous a Change? What could induce him to join at once with that despis'd Party whom he had so cruelly persecuted before? It is but just that we should believe the Account he himself gives of that Matter. He tells us that whilst he was journeying to *Damascus*, with a Commission from the High-Priest to use the same Methods of Persecution and Violence against the Disciples of Jesus there, that he had done in other Cities, *suddenly there shined round about him at Noon-day, a Light from Heaven above the Brightness of the Sun*; and when he and the rest that were with him *fell to the Earth*, he heard a Voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* and when he said, *Who art thou, Lord?* the Lord said, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; but rise, stand upon thy Feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a Minister and a Witness both of these Things which thou hast seen, and of those Things in the which I will appear unto thee, &c.* Acts 26. 12,—18.

It cannot be suppos'd without the highest Absurdity, that *Paul* feign'd this Account with a Design to impose upon others; since his own strong Prejudices and Inclinations, and a Regard to his Interests and Reputation among the Jews carried him powerfully the other Way; so that if he had been dispos'd to feign any thing, we may be sure it would have been something to the advantage of the Jewish, not of the Christian Cause. Nor can it be suppos'd that he himself was impos'd upon, and that what happen'd to him was merely the Effect of his own Fancy, without any thing of Reality in it. He did not at that Time believe the

the Resurrection of *Jesus*, and consequently had no Prejudices to work up his Imagination to a Vision so favourable to Christianity. He was in full Vigour of Health, and in the perfect Use of his Reason. It was at Mid-day, whilst he was actually journeying with several others in his Company, who all as well as he were struck down to the ground with the glorious Appearance. And if we suppose all this to be the effect of Fancy, there is an end of all Evidence; it is impossible for any Man to be certain of what he sees or hears; he may suppose it to be all Fancy and Delusion. Indeed the wonderful Effects that follow'd, sufficiently shewed the Reality of it. Struck blind with the Glory of this Appearance, *Paul* was led to *Damascus*, and there continued without Sight, and without eating or drinking three Days; and then a devout Man, one *Ananias*, came and laid his Hands upon him in the Name of *Jesus*, and he recover'd his Sight, and arose and was baptiz'd; and immediately he was filled with the Holy Ghost, inlightned in the Knowledge of Christ without human Instruction; for *he received not the Gospel which he preached of Man, neither was he taught it, but by the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Gal. i. 11, 12. And in consequence of this, he immediately preach'd, that *Jesus* was the Christ the Son of God, in the Jewish Synagogues in that very City, whither he came with a Design to persecute the Christians. And afterwards he was in *Labours and Sufferings more abundant* than any of the Apostles, of which he gives a surprizing Account, 2 Cor. 11. 23,—28. How nobly does he speak, *Acts* 20. 24. *None of these Things* (that is, Bonds and Afflictions) *move me, neither count I my Life dear unto my self, so that I might finish my Course with Joy, and the Ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of*
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the Grace of God. Add to all this, that he was endued with the most extraordinary Gifts, such as speaking with divers kind of Tongues which he had never learn'd, and the power of performing the most illustrious Miracles in the Name of Jesus; so that, as he himself speaks, *Christ wrought by him to make the Gentiles obedient in Word and Deed, through mighty Signs and Wonders, by the Power of the Spirit of God,* Rom. 15. 18, 19. These it must be own'd are wonderful Circumstances, and which taken together, exhibit an illustrious Testimony to the Truth of Christianity: Since never was there (all Things consider'd) a more unexceptionable Witness than the Apostle *Paul*.

Our Author, who has nothing else to object against his Testimony, would fain insinuate that *Paul* owns himself to be a wicked Man, in the Account he gives of his own Temper, *Rom. 7. 19, 23.* But certainly, if he intends there to draw the Character of a wicked Man, he does not describe his own, but speaks in the Person of an unconverted Jew, as this Writer cannot but know many Expositors understand it. And if it is to be understood of *Paul* himself (as others suppose) 'tis evident that he is there only complaining of the Remains of indwelling Sin and Corruption, which hinder'd him from yielding that perfect Obedience to the divine Law, and from serving God with that absolute Purity, and Promptitude and Diligence, to which he ardently aspir'd. This was very grievous to a Conscience so tender as his, and as he could not get intirely rid of this Incumbrance of Sin in this present State, he speaks of it as a Captivity and a Bondage, from which he hoped to be intirely deliver'd at Death, and to be admitted to a State of perfect Purity and Glory. And 'tis certain that many who have been not only innocent, but exemplary in their Lives, eminent for

for Piety and Goodness, have been full of Complaints of their own Defects, when comparing their own Frame and Practice with the absolute Perfection and Purity of the divine Law. The best of Men have been ever most exact in observing the Corruptions and irregular Motions of their own Hearts, and most deeply affected with them. And it is very probable that what they have with deep Humility lamented, our Author and those of his Complexion would account no Faults at all. But whatever Interpretation of this Passage we follow, 'tis certain that it could not possibly be the Apostle's Design, to represent himself as a wicked Man, going on in a presumptuous Course of Sin, in opposition to the Convictions of his own Mind. The contrary appears from his intire Conduct and Character. And it can never be suppos'd that he would represent himself under this Idea, when he so often appeals to those among whom he convers'd, and to God himself, concerning his own exemplary Conduct. *Ye are Witnesses and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblamably we behaved our selves among you that believe,* 1 Theff. 2. 10. *Our Rejoicing is this, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not by fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God, we have had our Conversation in the World, and more abundantly to you-wards,* 2 Cor. 1. 12.

I doubt not to affirm, that there is no Character in all Pagan Antiquity to be compar'd to that of the Apostle *Paul*, nor any one Instance among all their most celebrated great and good Men, that comes up to that eminent Degree of Virtue for which he was so remarkable. Whether we consider his ardent Love to God and Zeal for his Glory in the World, and for the Interests of pure and undefiled Religion and Righteousness; his extensive Benevolence towards Mankind, and un-

wearied Diligence and Constancy in promoting their Salvation; his Impartiality in reprov- ing Faults, and yet his great Tendernefs and Humanity in confidering and pitying the Frailties of Men; his remarkable Love to his Country, and earneft Desire of the Happinefs of his Country- men, notwithstanding all the Evils and Indignities he fuffer'd from them; his noble Fortitude and exemplary Patience under the greateft and moft various Sufferings, which perhaps, any one Man ever endur'd, and of which he gives fuch a mov- ing Account, 2 Cor. 11. extorted from him in his own Defence, but with a Modesty which can fcarce be equal'd; his astonishing Self-denial and generous Contempt of worldly Riches, Honours, and Pleasures; his noble Elevation of Soul, and vi- gorous Aspirations after a pure and sublime Happi- nefs in a future State, and all this accompanied with the profoundeft Humility, acknowledging himfelf *lefs than the leaft of all Saints*, and afcrib- ing nothing to himfelf, but all to the free Grace and Mercy of God; under each of thefe Heads it were eafy to produce furprizing Instances, to fhew that never was there among mere Men a more perfect and finish'd Character than his.

There is another Passage of our Author, rela- ting to the Characters of the firft Publishers of the Christian Revelation, that I fhall here take no- tice of. It is in p. 49, 50*, where after having produc'd a Passage out of the Epiftle afcrib'd to *Barnabas*, to fhew that *Jesus when he chofe his Apostles, took Men who had been very great Sinners, that thereby he might plainly fhew, that he came not to call the Righteous but Sinners to Repentance*; he adds, "that it may be faid in fupport of St. Bar-
" *nabas*, that the Apostles firft became Chrift's
" Disciples upon temporal Motives; and the Be-
" lief of Chrift's Kingdom was fo firmly rooted in
" them,

* P. 42, 43.

“ them, that Jesus neither during his Life, nor
 “ even after his Resurrection, was able to remove
 “ it.” Which he proves from their Contention
 at his last Supper, *who should be greatest*, and from
 the Question they propos’d to him after his Resur-
 rection, *Lord wilt thou at this Time restore the*
Kingdom to Israel?

As to the Citation from *Barnabas*, allowing for
 the hyperbolical manner of Expression, the Design
 of it is no more than what *St. Paul* expresses, *1*
Tim. 1. 15, 16. This is a faithful Saying, and
worthy of all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came
into the World to save Sinners, of whom I am chief.
Howbeit, for this Cause I obtained Mercy, that in
me first, Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suf-
fering, for a Pattern to them which should hereafter
believe on him to Life everlasting. He here calls
 himself the *chief* or the *greatest* of *Sinners*, as *Bar-*
nabas (if he writ that Epistle) calls the Apostles,
 Men that were *sinful above all Sinfulness*; but yet
Paul, though he speaks thus of himself, was not
 a profligate Person remarkable for Wickedness,
 even before his Conversion. His external Con-
 versation was *blameless*, as he intimates, *Phil. 3.*
6. And though he persecuted the name of Christ
 and his Discip’les with great Severity, yet in this
 he acted according to his Conscience, though a
 misguided one; for he *verily thought he ought to*
do many Things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Na-
zareth, as himself tells us, *Acts 26. 9.* He was
 therefore before his Conversion far from being a
 Cheat, a Villain, a Man abandon’d to Vice. Yet
 what Epithets does he afterwards bestow upon him-
 self, from a just Sense of his own Unworthiness,
 and an Abhorrence of his former Courses? He re-
 presents himself as *the chief* of *Sinners*, the *unwor-*
thiest of all Men to be call’d and chosen by Christ,
 as having been before a *Blasphemer* and a *Perse-*

cutor, and injurious, though he owns he did it ignorantly in unbelief, 1 Tim. i. 13. And it is probable that Barnabas, or whoever writ that Epistle, had this Passage of Paul, and the calling of Matthew the Publican particularly in View; for it is on the Occasion of calling Matthew or Levi, that Christ declares in the Words cited by Barnabas, that he came not to call the Righteous but Sinners to Repentance, Luke 5. 27, 32.

It was remarkable in the Apostles of Jesus, that they were very far from boasting of their own Merits, or ascribing their being call'd and chosen to any Worth in themselves, but wholly to the rich Grace and Mercy of God. An Instance of their deep Humility! And if they sometimes spoke in Terms somewhat hyperbolical of their former Unworthiness, this does not prove that they had been wickeder than all others, but that they were the humblest of all Men, and the furthest from vain boasting.

But after all, let us suppose the Apostles before their Conversion to have been as bad and wicked as our Author would have 'em thought to be, the most profligate of Sinners; the more wonderful was the Change wrought upon them by the Instructions and the Spirit of Jesus; since it appears from their whole Conduct, that never were there Men of a more consummate Virtue than they afterwards appear'd to be. If to make it the Business of their Lives, to promote the Honour of God and the Happiness and Salvation of Mankind; if to endeavour to reclaim the Jews from their narrow Notions, and from their Expectations of a temporal Messiah, to the Hopes of a pure and spiritual Salvation, and to an universal Benevolence towards Mankind; if to bring the Gentiles from the Worship of Idols, and from the many absurd and impious Rites of a vain Superstition, to the Acknowledgment and to the pure and rational

Adoration of the living and true God ; if to turn Men from a sensual vicious Course to the Practice of the most pure and refin'd Morality, and to instruct them to raise their Desires, their Affections and Views, above the low things of Sense to Glory and Immortality ; if this were a noble Work, and of the highest Benefit to Mankind ; and if to do all this without any Expectation of worldly Advantages to themselves, yea and in a direct Opposition to all their worldly Interests, and to submit chearfully to the most grievous Sufferings and Persecutions, and shed their Blood in the glorious Cause of the Reformation of Mankind ; if this be (as it manifestly is) the noblest Pitch of Virtue to which the human Nature can be suppos'd to arrive ; then certainly the Apostles were Instances of the most eminent Virtue and Goodness that ever appear'd in the World. What a poor Figure do the most celebrated Philosophers and good Men of Paganism make, compar'd with so heroick a Virtue ? And even *Socrates* himself, who instead of bearing a glorious Testimony against the Superstitions of his Country, appeal'd to *Apollo's* Oracle in his own Defence, and countenanc'd them with his dying Breath ?

If the Apostles then were wicked and ignorant before Jesus call'd them, this, instead of being turn'd to the disadvantage of their Testimony, is only a proof of the surprizing and glorious Change that was wrought upon them. Who ever said or thought, that the Debaucheries and Effeminacy of *Polemo*, from which he was reclaim'd by the Philosophy of *Xenocrates*, was a disadvantage to the Reputation of the Philosophy he embrac'd ? Or was not this always mention'd to the honour of it ? The Apostles were themselves living Instances of the happy Influence and Tendency of the Gospel they preach'd, and of the Efficacy of that

Grace and Spirit of Jesus which they so much extoll'd.

It was very ill judg'd of this Author, to lay such a Stress as he does in the Passage above cited upon the Apostles Expectations of a temporal Messiah and a worldly Kingdom. For this only shews how strong and deeply rooted their Prejudices were in favour of those darling Notions which they had so deeply imbib'd, and which the Jews in general were so very fond of; and this renders it improbable to the highest Degree, that if they had been to invent a Religion of their own, they would have formed such a Scheme as that of the Gospel. Can it be imagin'd, that those who were intoxicated with the pleasing Ideas of the temporal Glory and Grandeur of the Messiah, and the mighty Dominion and Dignity to which he was to raise their Nation, should, if left to themselves and their own Invention, have ever thought of setting up for a Messiah one that had been crucified, and who declar'd that his *Kingdom was not of this World*; and thereby have subverted all their own flattering Hopes with which they were so infinitely delighted, and all their own boasted Privileges above other Nations? Can it be suppos'd that *Jews*, who had such a high Conceit of themselves, and such a Contempt of the *Gentiles*, should ever have thought of publishing it to the World, that now the *Partition Wall was broken down*, the distinction of Nations taken away, and the *Gentiles* were made *Fellow-heirs and of the same Body*, set on a Level with themselves as to their Interest in the Messiah, and the Benefits they expected from him? Nothing could have brought the Apostles into such a Scheme as this, so directly contrary to all their favourite Prejudices common to them with their whole Nation, but the irresistible Force of Evidence. But to say as
this

this Author does, that Jesus after his Resurrection, no more than before, was not able to remove their Belief of the temporal Kingdom of the Messiah, is manifestly false. This Notion of theirs was fully cured and removed after our Saviour's Resurrection, when the Spirit (which Christ had promised) was poured forth upon them from on high. And their coming so late into it plainly shews, with how much difficulty they themselves were brought to get over their Prejudices, and therefore gives a strong Confirmation to their Testimony.



C H A P. III.

The Author's Objections against the Proof from Miracles consider'd; That they are not an uncertain Proof, nor useless nor needless; That there are certain Marks and Characters by which true divine Miracles may be distinguish'd from those pretended to be wrought by Impostors, or the Agency of evil Spirits; And that these Characters are to be found in the Miracles wrought in favour of the Jewish and Christian Revelation.

HAVING consider'd that Part of the Argument for the Proof of the Scripture Revelation, which arises from the Character of the Persons that were the Publishers of it, and remov'd the Author's Exceptions, I shall now proceed to consider the illustrious external Attestations by which that Revelation and the divine Mission and Authority of the first Publishers of it stands confirm'd. The Proof that they were inspir'd and

sent of God, does not rest meerly on their own Word, however worthy of Credit we suppose them to be; but they produced the most authentick Credentials and Attestations of their divine Mission; which were of such a Nature, and so circumstanc'd, that (as has been already hinted) they cou'd not have impos'd them upon Mankind, if they had not been true, though they had been ever so desirous to do so. This will appear from a particular Consideration of the Nature of those Credentials and Attestations they produced. *God bore them witness* (as the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* speaks) *with Signs and Wonders and divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own Will*, Heb. 2. 4.

Our Author offers nothing particularly against the Miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament; but he has several Things that are design'd to invalidate the Proof from Miracles in general. And what he offers on this Subject may be reduced to two Heads. *1st*, That Miracles are a very uncertain Proof, and not to be depended on for the Confirmation of any Religion. *2dly*, That Miracles are intirely useles and unnecessary; since Doctrines that are in their own nature morally good need no Miracles to prove them; and if they be either bad or of an indifferent nature, they are incapable of being prov'd by Miracles.

I shall examine these Things distinctly; and first shall consider what he offers to shew that Miracles are a very uncertain Proof, and that no Argument can be drawn from thence for the Confirmation of any Religion.

I need not take any particular notice of what he so often repeats, and seems to lay a great Stress upon, that *all Religions equally pretend to Miracles*. It does not follow that because there have been many

many Miracles falsely pretended, therefore there have been no real ones, and that because this kind of Proof has been made use of by Cheats and Impostors, therefore it can in no case be depended on at all; no more than it follows, that because all Parties pretend to have Truth and right Reason on their side, therefore there is no such thing as Truth and right Reason; and because Men of all Religions (as this Writer himself tells us) pretend to internal Marks, and that *their Religion contains every thing that is worthy, and nothing unworthy of God*, therefore there are no such things as internal Marks or Characters whereby any Religion is to be tried, though our Author regards this as the only good Proof that can be brought for any Religion. The Reflection that naturally offers it self on this Occasion is this, that the Reason why Impostors have pretended to Miracles is, that they have taken advantage of this common Notion that has always prevail'd amongst Mankind, and which may be well regarded as the Dictate of Nature, that Miracles or extraordinary Works above the Power of Man to perform are the Voice of God, and Signs of his Interposition in behalf of a Doctrine or Religion so attested. If this did not seem a reasonable Principle, it wou'd not be in the power of Impostors to build so much upon it as they have done.

But what our Author principally insists upon to shew that Miracles are an uncertain Proof not to be depended on, and that no Argument can be drawn from thence to shew that a Revelation comes from God, is, that *Miracles can be perform'd by evil as well as good Beings*. He tells us, *'tis in vain to have recourse to Miracles, since evil as well as good Beings have the Power of doing them*, p. 200.* He adds, that “in the Old Testament,
“ God

* P. 176, 177.

“ God is said to suffer Miracles to be done by
 “ false Prophets, in order to prove his People,
 “ *Deut. 13. 1—3.* And in the New, such Mira-
 “ cles, as wou’d, *if it were possible, deceive the*
 “ *very Elect,* *Matt. 24. 24.*” And again, p.
 245. † that “ it is plain from what our Saviour
 “ says, *Matt. 7. 22, 23.* that neither Prophecies
 “ nor Miracles are absolute Securities for Men to
 “ depend upon; and that one of the Apostles
 “ that wrought Miracles, even to the raising the
 “ Dead, betrayed Christ.”

Because our Author, and others before him,
 have laid a mighty Stress on this Way of talk-
 ing concerning the supposed Power of evil Be-
 ings to work Miracles, I shall consider this Mat-
 ter distinctly. And,

1st, I grant freely, that many strange things
 may be effected by human Art or Skill, without
 the Interposition of any superiour Being at all;
 and that many Things that have pass’d for Mira-
 cles, and have seem’d to the ignorant Vulgar to
 be owing to a supernatural Power, have yet been
 effected meerly by the Art and Management of
 cunning Men. And I will easily grant what this
 Author insinuates, that the more ignorant the
 People are, the more apt they are to be impos’d
 upon in this matter.

2^{dly}, I further grant, that Evil Spirits may be
 supposed to have far greater both Power and Skill
 than any Man upon Earth, and may therefore be
 supposed to be able to do very astonishing Things,
 far transcending all human Art and Power. Whe-
 ther this Gentleman really thinks that there are
 evil Spirits who have great Power, I shall not now
 inquire. What he offers, *Pag. 388.* looks so like
 a denying and ridiculing the Notion of ’em, that
 I think there is reason to conclude that he be-
 lieves

believes little or nothing concerning them. And if so, he has no Right to make use of the present Supposition, but is oblig'd to account for Miracles some other way. And so this Part of the Argument, and which he seems to lay so great Stress upon, intirely falls, and he himself must think it of no weight at all. But since the Scriptures assure us, and it is granted by Christians, that there are evil Spirits who have great Power, I will allow the Supposition as true in it self, though not as proper to be made use of by the Deists, except they will also fairly own that they believe there are evil Spirits, who have it in their power to do strange Things.

Yet, *3dly*, I doubt not to affirm, that there may be Miracles wrought of such a nature and so circumstanc'd, that we may have a sufficient Certainty that they are not only above the Power of Man to effect without the Assistance of superiour Beings, but are not wrought by any evil Beings whatsoever; but either by the immediate Power of God himself, or, which comes to the same thing, by the Agency of good Beings of a superiour Order to Man, commission'd and empower'd by God himself to this purpose.

That there may be Miracles of such a nature, and so circumstanc'd, that we may be absolutely certain that they are above the power of Man to effect, without the Assistance of superiour Beings, admits of a clear Demonstration; nor do I find that this Author denies it. For though we may be suppos'd not to know how far the Power of other Beings extends, yet in many Cases we may certainly know that such or such Things exceed the Power of Man. Taking this for granted, I proceed to shew that there may be Miracles of such a nature, and so circumstanc'd, that we may
be

be certain they were not wrought by any evil Beings whatsoever.

And first, one way by which we may be assur'd, that Miracles are not wrought by the Agency or Interposition of any evil Beings whatsoever, is by considering the Nature and Tendency of those Doctrines, and of that Religion which those Miracles are designed to attest. For if that Religion be evidently calculated to advance the Glory of God, and the Interests of Virtue, and Goodness, and Righteousness in the World, and to reclaim Men from the Practice of Sin and Vice, of Superstition and Idolatry; it cannot be supposed that evil Beings, who, if they be such, must delight in Wickedness, and Vice, and Idolatry, and have a fixed Enmity to God and Goodness, wou'd employ their Power to do extraordinary Works, for attesting and confirming a Religion and Doctrines of so excellent a Tendency. For this wou'd be, to suppose them to act contrary to their own Nature and Interests, and to take Pains to subvert their own Kingdom; it wou'd be to suppose them to change their Nature and Character; and then they wou'd no longer be evil Beings, which is contrary to the present Supposition. Our Saviour's Argument in this Case against the Pharisees is unanswerable, *if Satan cast out Satan, how can his Kingdom stand?*

But it may be said, that to prove the Miracles by the Doctrine, and again the Doctrine by the Miracles wrought to attest that Doctrine, is to run into a manifest Circle. But the Answer is easy; we don't prove the Divinity of Miracles by the Truth of the Doctrines, and again the Truth of the Doctrines by the Miracles wrought to attest them; for this wou'd be to suppose, that we actually knew the Doctrines to be true, antecedently to the Miracles wrought to attest them,
and

and yet, that we knew and believ'd them, only because they were attested by Miracles ; which is a plain Inconsistency. But we are to distinguish here between the Truth of Doctrines and the good Tendency of them ; for these are very distinct Things, [the Attempt the Author makes to confound them shall be considered afterwards.] We may upon considering the Nature of Doctrines, or of a Religion professing to come from God, find upon examination that it is of a good Tendency, and if true, wou'd furnish strong Motives to the Practice of Righteousness ; but this good Tendency of the Doctrines wou'd not alone prove them true ; or that the first Publishers of that Religion were actually sent and commission'd of God in an extraordinary manner by special Revelation. But if they shou'd further, in Attestation of their divine Mission, and of the Truth and Divinity of the Doctrines they taught, perform many wonderful Works far transcending all human Power and Skill, and which therefore evidently shew the Agency and Interposition of a superiour Power ; it may be undeniably concluded from the excellent Tendency of that Religion, that those wonderful Works were not wrought by evil Spirits, who wou'd never use any extraordinary Events to give Testimony to a Religion, which if believ'd manifestly tends to deter Men from Vice and Wickedness, and to promote the Interests of Piety, Righteousness, and Charity in the World. And being thus convinc'd, that these Miracles are above the Power of Man, and yet not wrought by evil Beings, we may justly regard them as proceeding immediately from God himself, or, which is the same thing, from good Beings superiour to Mankind, acting under his Direction ; and consequently may regard them as divine Attestations to the Truth of
that

that Religion, in confirmation of which they were wrought ; and may therefore from these extraordinary miraculous Attestations argue, that that Religion is certainly true ; concerning which, we cou'd only say before that it might be true, and was of a good Tendency.

It appears upon this View, that the Proofs drawn from the good Tendency of the Doctrines, and from the Miracles wrought in attestation of those Doctrines, are perfectly consistent, and derive mutual Light and Support to one another ; and that here is one Way of being absolutely certain that Miracles are not wrought by evil Beings, and of distinguishing those supposed to be perform'd by such Beings, from those wrought by the immediate Power of God himself, or the Agency of good Beings superiour to Man, acting under his Direction.

Secondly, Another Way of knowing that Miracles are not wrought by evil Beings, is by considering the Nature of the Works themselves. For they may have such a Grandeur in them, and may exhibit such amazing Displays of irresistible Power, and may shew such a Dominion over the Laws of Nature, that it is scarce possible not to regard them as proceeding from the great Maker and Governour of the Universe, the Lord of Nature ; and therefore it cannot reasonably be supposed (granting a Providence that over-rules all the Affairs of this lower World) that God wou'd ever suffer any evil Beings to perform such glorious Works, especially a Succession of them for several Years together, (and that without being controll'd or over-power'd by superiour Miracles) in Attestation of an Imposture.

I am not now enquiring how far the Power of evil Beings may possibly extend. We need not be solicitous about this, which is a Question we cannot

not easily resolve; but whatever the Power of evil Beings may be supposed to be, yet certainly their Power has Limits prescrib'd to it. We must suppose (except we allow an infinite independent evil Principle) that they are under the Dominion of the Lord of Nature, who is infinitely good, the Father of Mankind; and therefore it cannot be supposed, that he will suffer any evil Being, not only to usurp his own Name and Authority, but to do such repeated glorious Works in confirmation of it, as will naturally and almost unavoidably lead those that behold them, to regard them as Proofs, that he by whose Power they are wrought, is the true God, and to be acknowledg'd as such.

Thus, e. g. let us put the Case, that there were such things really done as attended the first Establishment of the Mosaick Dispensation. Such a Series of stupendous Miracles, which seem'd to argue a Dominion over all Nature, as are recorded to have been wrought in *Egypt*, at the Red Sea, at the giving of the Law at *Sinai*, and in the Wilderness for forty Years together, as well as at the first Entrance of the *Israelites* into the Land of *Canaan*; I think I may appeal to the common Sense of Mankind, whether supposing these things true, they were not a Succession of Works, so grand, so marvellous, and unparallel'd, and of such an extraordinary Nature, that it is scarce possible to help regarding them as evident Proofs of the Interposition of a Deity; and therefore whether it can be supposed, that the most just and wise Governor of the World would suffer an evil Being uncontrolled to do all this in his Name? especially when it is consider'd, that the particular Design of all this Succession of stupendous Works was to shew, that he by whose Power and Authority they were wrought, was the only true God, and that

he and no other was to be acknowledged and ador'd as such?

Our Author elsewhere reflecting upon the Account given in Scripture of the Temptations of Satan, thinks it very unaccountable, "that God would continue to suffer this subtle and malignant Spirit, endow'd with an universal Knowledge of what is past, and a deep Penetration into Futurity, to range about deceiving and circumventing Mankind, p. 388 *." 'Tis easy to answer according to the Scriptures, that Satan, though permitted to tempt Men, is not suffer'd to compel them to sin, and it is still in their power to resist him, if it be not their own fault; and there is nothing in this but what is reconcilable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God, (as I may have occasion to shew afterwards.) But to suppose that God should suffer an evil Being to usurp his own sacred Name and Authority in such a solemn manner, pretending to be the only true God; and to give Laws in his Name with such amazing Circumstances of divine Majesty and Grandeur; and to inflict such awful Judgments on the Unbelieving and Disobedient; and, in a word, to confirm the Imposture by a Succession of such astonishing Works, far exceeding all the known Powers of Nature, and that for a Series of Years together; so that we cannot conceive that if a Law were really given from Heaven, it cou'd come recommended and confirm'd by more illustrious Attestations; to suppose this, I say, cannot possibly be reconcil'd to any Notions we have of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, or to the Belief of a good Providence continually conducting and governing the Affairs of Men.

What could the People do that were Witnesses to all this? I think I may almost appeal to to our Infidels

Infidels themselves, whether if they had been then alive, and amongst that People, they could have refused to submit to all this Evidence, or to receive Laws thus attested and confirm'd, as of Divine Authority? especially when they saw that those that presum'd to oppose this Authority, and refused to acknowledge the Hand of God, exposed themselves to the most dreadful Judgments as a Punishment for their Obstinacy and Unbelief. The Earth opened her Mouth and swallowed them up, Fire from Heaven consum'd them, and the Plague destroy'd them. It was scarce possible for human Nature to hold out against such Evidence and such irresistible Demonstrations of a Divine Power. And to suppose that God would suffer all this to be done by an evil Being, pretending his Name and Authority in Confirmation of an Imposture, would be to suppose that he gave them up without Remedy to the Influence of Satan, so as even to be compell'd into the Delusion. We find in fact that this Succession of mighty Acts did at length effectually subdue the Stupidity and Obstinacy of that People, and engaged them to submit to Laws, which were contrary to all their Prejudices, and to the Idolatry which they had so deeply imbib'd in *Egypt*. And we often find the *Israelites* in succeeding Ages reflecting on the glorious Miracles and Wonders, wrought before their Fathers in *Egypt* and in the Wilderness, as incontestable Proofs of the Divine Authority of the Law, and that the Lord in whose Name they were wrought was God alone. And the Effect it had on them, it ought to have on all those that believe the Truth of those Facts, to convince them that the Laws thus attested came from God, and that *Moses* was extraordinarily sent of him.

The same Reasoning may be applied to the Miracles wrought at the first Establishment of the

Christian Revelation. Let us suppose, that a Person calling himself the Son of God, and professing to be sent from Heaven to be the Saviour and Instructor of Mankind, did, in Confirmation of his Divine Mission and Authority, perform the most astonishing Acts of Power and Goodness; that he at once heal'd those that were sick of the most desperate Diseases, cleansed the Lepers, caused the Lame to walk, the Dumb to speak, and the Blind to see, and raised the very Dead; that he did all this with an Air of Grandeur and Sovereignty, as if he had been the Lord of Nature; he only spoke and it was done; and he empower'd his Disciples to do the same glorious Works in his Name, and by his Authority; that he fed five thousand Men at once, besides Women and Children, with five Loaves and two Fishes; that he commanded the Winds and the Seas, and they obey'd him; that he discerned the Spirits of Men, and knew their most secret Thoughts; that twice was he proclaim'd by an audible Voice from Heaven to be the beloved Son of God; that he foretold his own Sufferings, which he was to endure for the Sins of Mankind; and what was the most astonishing of all, appeal'd to his own Resurrection from the Dead as the most illustrious Proof of his Divine Mission; and that accordingly he rose again on the third Day; and after having shew'd himself alive after his Passion for forty Days, by such infallible Proofs, that those that saw him (which were many at different times) could not doubt that it was he, without renouncing the Testimony of all their Senses; he ascended visibly into Heaven, and within ten Days after, as he himself had expressly promised and foretold, he poured forth the Holy Spirit upon his Disciples from on high; so that they were immediately endued with an extraordinary Measure of Wisdom and Knowledge.

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Their former Prejudices were subdued ; they spoke at once divers Languages which they had never learnt ; they were enabled in the Name of a risen Jesus, and by Power derived from him, to perform the most wonderful Works, such as he himself had wrought, and which visibly transcended the Power of Man. And many of those whom they had converted to the Faith of Christ, had by the Imposition of their Hands in his Name, the same wonderful Powers of working Miracles, and the same extraordinary Gifts of the Holy Ghost communicated to them. Thus they went through all the World, preaching the Gospel of Jesus to the several Nations in their several Languages, and *confirming the Word with Signs following.* These things were not done in a Corner, or in a few Instances, which might admit some Suspicion of an Imposture ; but in innumerable Instances, for a Succession of Years together, in the view of Multitudes, yea even of their bitterest Enemies. And accordingly this Religion, though contrary to the rooted Prejudices both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and though it had all the Powers of the World engaged against it, soon made an amazing Progress ; and thousands every where overcome with the glorious Proofs of a Divine Interposition in its favour, embraced it even at the hazard of their Lives and of their dearest worldly Interests. And now, I think, upon a deliberate view of all this Evidence, we must say, that either God hath forsaken the Earth, and takes no care of Mankind, or he would never suffer an Imposture to be thus carried on, and thus confirm'd for so many Years together, by a Series of such astonishing Acts of Power, as must naturally lead the honestest Part of Mankind, and those that had the greatest Reverence for the Deity, to receive a Religion thus attested and confirmed.

It is true, that, as this Author has it from Dr. *Clark*, “ Doctrines which are in their own Nature
 “ necessarily false and impossible to be true, such
 “ as are all Absurdities and Contradictions, and
 “ all Doctrines that tend to promote Vice, can
 “ never be proved true by all the Miracles in the
 “ World.” But I doubt not to affirm, that there
 never were nor could be any Miracles wrought in
 Confirmation of such absurd and impious, and im-
 moral Doctrines, that could in the least be com-
 pared with those that were done at the Establissh-
 ment and in Confirmation of the *Jewish* and *Chri-*
stian Dispensation. It is in the power of human
 Art to do strange things; and we may suppose it
 possible, and permitted by Divine Wisdom, that
 some wonderful things should be done now and then
 by the Agency of evil Spirits. But to suppose a
 Succession of the most astonishing Acts of irre-
 sistible Power, done in the Face of Multitudes,
 and for a Series of Years together, and which bear
 such illustrious Signatures of a Divine Hand, that
 Men could scarce possibly help regarding them as
 owing to the special Interposition of the Lord of
 Nature; to suppose such Things done in the Cause
 of Vice and Imposture, is not to be reconciled to
 any Notions we have of the Wisdom and Goodness
 of a superintending Providence; it would be to lay
 too strong a Temptation in the way of his Creatures,
 and would be too great a Trial to human Frailty.
 We may be sure that a wise and good God will al-
 ways take care, that no pretended Miracles for
 Confirmation of a false, or impious, or immoral
 Doctrine, can ever come up to the strong Evidence
 that he has given for the Confirmation of the true.

Moses indeed, in a Passage cited by this Author,
Deut. 13. 1, 2, 3. supposes it possible for a Prophet
 (that is, one pretending to that Character) to work
 a Wonder to seduce the *Jews* to Idolatry, saying,
 Let

Let us go after other Gods, and let us serve them; and in that case warns them not to regard that Prophet or his pretended Miracle; for that God permitted this only to *prove them*, whether they *loved the Lord their God with all their Heart and with all their Soul*. And it might well be supposed that such Impostors might arise, and by Art or Management, or perhaps by the Assistance of evil Spirits, do some surprizing Things. But what would such Wonders be, compared with those which *Moses* himself had wrought in the Name of God, and by which the *Jewish* Law was establish'd? So that still the People would have a sufficient Security against the Delusion, by reflecting not only on the Nature of the Doctrine itself, but on the infinitely greater Things that were done in Confirmation of that Law, from which such pretended Prophets would endeavour to draw them, since all their Wonders would vanish, and appear as nothing in the Comparison.

Accordingly, *Moses* adds, *that Prophet, or that Dreamer of Dreams, shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God, which brought you out of the Land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the House of Bondage*, ver. 5. where he plainly supposes, that the Consideration of the great Things God had wrought for them, and whereby he evidently shew'd that he was the only true God, ought to hinder them from regarding any pretended Wonder, wrought by any Person whatsoever, to withdraw them from his Love and Service. Accordingly he frequently appeals to the glorious Miracles that had been done before the Children of *Israel*, to shew how highly exalted the Lord was above all the pretended Gods of the Heathens, and that none of their Works could be compared to his; see *Exod.* 15. 11. *Deut.* 3. 24. Speaking of the wonderful

Works he had done, he saith, *What God is there in Heaven or in Earth that can do according to thy Works, and according to thy Might?* And he challenges all Nations and Ages to produce any thing like what had been done for *Israel*, particularly, the Wonders he wrought in *Egypt*, and at the giving of the Law at *Sinai*, *Deut. 4. 32, 33, 34.* and then he adds, *Unto thee it was shew'd* [that is, these Miracles of which he had been just speaking, were done before thine Eyes] *that thou mightest know, that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him.* Where he plainly argues from the unparallel'd Glory and Grandeur of the Miracles themselves, that they could proceed from none but God himself; and that they were evident Proofs, that he in whose Name and by whose Power they were wrought, was God alone, and to be acknowledged and adored as such. But they could not be Proofs of this, that he was God and none else, if it could be supposed, that any other Being was able, or was permitted, to do Works that might equal these in Greatness and Might. This evidently shews, that in the Passage cited above and produced by this Author, *Moses* is far from supposing it possible, that ever any false Prophet should work such Miracles to confirm a false Religion, as he had done, in the Name and by the Power of God himself, in *Egypt*, and at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness.

As to the Wonders wrought by the *Egyptian* Magicians, which some lay a great Stress upon; this is so far from shewing, that there can be no Miracles wrought by true Prophets in the Name and by the Power of God, but the same may be wrought by false ones in a bad Cause, and that therefore no certain Proof can be brought from Miracles at all; that it strongly proves the contrary. Since though those Magicians were suffer'd
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to do some strange Things, yet after having try'd their utmost Power and Skill, they were soon confounded and defeated, and forced to acknowledge a superior Divine Hand.

Our Saviour frequently appeals to his own Miracles as sufficient Proofs of his Divine Mission. Thus he declares, *the Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me, Joh. 5. 36.* And if I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not, but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the Works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him, Joh. 10. 37, 38. And again, *believe me for the very Work's sake, Joh. 14. 11.* And speaking of the unbelieving Jews, he saith, *If I had not done among them the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin, Joh. 15. 24.* 'Tis true, our Saviour supposes some Men might prophesy and cast out Devils, and do many wonderful Works in his Name, who yet should be finally rejected by him as Workers of Iniquity, *Matth. 7. 22, 23.* But this is far from shewing (as this Author concludes from it, p. 245.) that neither *Prophecies nor Miracles are absolute Securities for Men to depend upon.* It only shews, that the doing such Miracles will not intitle those that perform them to eternal Salvation, without real Holiness of Heart and Life. This is the admirable Instruction our Saviour there gives to his Disciples. But yet those Miracles wrought in the Name of Christ, and in Attestation of his Doctrine, might be Proofs to others of the Truth of that Doctrine they were brought to attest, though to the Persons that perform'd them, they were not alone sufficient Evidences of their own Title to Happiness, without the Practice of Righteousness. Our Author tells us, that *one of the Apostles that wrought Miracles, even to the raising the Dead, be-*

tray'd Christ. How he came to know so positively that *Judas* raised the Dead, I can't tell; but supposing he did, the Miracles that he wrought, were sufficient Proofs of what they were wrought to attest, which was not the Piety and Goodness of the particular Person that perform'd them, but the Divinity of our Saviour's Mission, by whose Power and in whose Name they were wrought. For the Apostles wrought all their Miracles in the Name of Christ, and not in their own; and we may be sure, that if *Judas* had set up himself for the Messiah, he would not have been empowered to work such Miracles.

Our Saviour, indeed, forewarns his Disciples of Persons that should work Wonders to *deceive, if possible, the very Elect*, Matth. 24. 24. This evidently relates to the false Christs, and false Prophets that arose soon after among the *Jews*, many of which are mention'd by *Josephus*; cunning Fellows indeed, and who had the Art to amuse the Vulgar for a while; but the Event soon discover'd the Imposture, and the Vanity of their Pretences. Nor did any of those Impostors, or *Barchochebas* himself, the most famous of them all, with his juggling Trick of breathing Fire and Flame out of his Mouth, ever so much as pretend to perform any thing, that could in the least be compared with the glorious Miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, in number, greatness, or continuance.

If what some have reported be true, that *Vespasian* cured a blind and a lame Man at *Alexandria*, at the time when he assum'd the Empire, it would only follow, that Divine Providence order'd or permitted this, to establish his Authority in so important a Conjunction of Affairs. But it could not be said in that case, that these things were done in Attestation of a Falshood. The Use made of them was only to shew, that it was the Will of Heaven he

he should be Emperor, and it was really so; he was establish'd in the Empire, and overcame all Opposition. But after all, it is very probable, these things were only contrived by cunning and artificial Men, with a politick View to procure *Vespasian* a greater Veneration from the People, and settle his new Authority. *Suetonius*, when he relates the Story, introduces it with observing, that
“ an Authority, and a certain Majesty, and Awe,
“ were wanting in him, as being created Prince
“ unexpectedly, and without Preparation; and
“ that these were soon obtain'd, by his working
“ these Cures.” And who durst be so presumptuous, as to enquire very critically into the Truth and Reality of these Things, in which the Interests of a mighty Emperor were so nearly concerned? A Juggle might be artfully carried on in one or two Instances, when such a political End was to be served by it. But how poor a Shift must those be reduced to, that pretend to set these in competition with that glorious Succession of unparallel'd Miracles, that were wrought in Attestation of Christianity for a Series of Years together, in hundreds, yea, thousands of Instances, in the View of numerous discerning Enemies, and where there could be no Temptation to juggle from a View to worldly Interests, nor possibility of carrying it on (as it was circumstanced) without being detected?

The Apostle *Paul* supposes, that the coming of Antichrist shall be *after the working of Satan, with all Power, and Signs, and lying Wonders*, 2 Thes. 2. 9. But certainly he never supposed, that Antichrist should be able to produce such glorious Proofs of a Divine Power and Authority, as might any way come into competition with the illustrious Attestations given to Christ and his Divine Mission. Nor indeed, can it be thought consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of Divine Providence, to
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suffer Satan to do as much in favour of an Imposture, as God himself had done to give Testimony to his own Son when he sent him into the World.

Our Author, to prove that St. Paul lays the whole Stress, not upon Miracles, but upon the internal Marks, produces that Passage, *Gal. 1. 8. Though we or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed*, p. 193*. But the Design of the Apostle here, is not to invalidate the Evidence of the Gospel, drawn from the miraculous Attestations that accompanied it. It is only a vehement Form of Affelevation, to shew that they were not to hearken to any Person whatsoever, how fair and specious soever his Pretences might be, that should attempt to preach another Gospel. But why were they to have such a Regard to the Gospel that Paul had preached among them, as not to hearken to any Person whatsoever that should bring a different one? One Reason was, because it had come confirm'd with such illustrious Attestations, as were manifest Proofs of its Divine Authority; and which could not be equall'd by any false Pretender. Thus in that very Epistle afterwards, he appeals to the Miracles that were done in Confirmation of the Gospel; *He that ministrerh to you the Spirit* (says he) *and worketh Miracles among you, doth he it by the Works of the Law, or by the Hearing of Faith?* Gal. 3. 5. And he often elsewhere speaks to the same purpose. So Rom. 15. 18, 19. he mentions those things which Christ had wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient by Word and Deed, through mighty Signs and Wonders, by the Power of the Spirit of God. And he tells the Corinthians, that by him the Signs of an Apostle were wrought among them in Signs, and Wonders, and mighty Deeds, 2 Cor. 11. 12.

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The Sum is this; our Author thinks Miracles are no certain Proof of the Truth of any Doctrine, or of the divine Mission of any Person in whose favour they are wrought, because they may be wrought by evil Beings as well as good ones, and that there are no certain Marks to distinguish between the one and the other. In opposition to this it has been shewn, that Miracles may be of such a nature, and so circumstanc'd, that we may be certain they did not proceed from any evil Beings whatsoever. And it has been particularly shewn, that such were the Miracles wrought at the first Establishment of the Jewish and Christian Revelation. For first, they were performed with such an excellent Design, they were so manifestly intended to promote the Honour of God in the World, and the Practice of universal Righteousness, and to reclaim Men from Idolatry, and from Vice, from Wickedness, and Impurity; that they cannot, without the highest Absurdity, be suppos'd to proceed from evil Beings: and besides this, they were in themselves so grand and glorious, and exhibited such amazing Displays of irresistible Power, and there was such a Succession of them for several Years together, that we cannot, without casting the highest Reflections on God and his Providence, suppose that he would suffer them to be wrought by evil Beings in attestation of an Imposture; and therefore they must be regarded as authentick Proofs of the divine Mission of those by whom they were wrought, and of the Truth, and Certainty, and divine Original of that Revelation, in Attestation of which they were perform'd.

It is easy to judge by what has been said, of our Author's odd Assertion, p. 192*. that "if Miracles can be performed by evil as well as by good Beings, the worst Religion may have the
" most

* P. 169.

“ most Miracles, as needing them most.” It may be justly affirm’d on the contrary, that if there be a God and a Providence that governs the World, and controuls the Power of those evil Beings, we may be sure that he will never suffer such Miracles to be wrought in confirmation of a false Religion, as can come into any competition with those wrought in Attestation of the true; he will never suffer his own Hand and Seal to be so counterfeited, as to leave no marks of Distinction between the one and the other. The reason of the Thing leads us to think so, and Matter of Fact is in this agreeable to what Reason dictates, since no History gives an Account of any Miracles pretended to be wrought in proof of any false Religion, that could in the least be compar’d with those recorded to have been wrought at the Establishment of the *Mosaick* Law, or of the Gospel of Jesus. This Author, indeed, pretends “ that there are “ no Miracles recorded in the Bible, but many of “ the like Nature are to be found in Pagan Histories, p. 192*.” But what Histories does he mean? Will he send us to the Writings of the Heathen Poets and Mythologists? And the Accounts of what they themselves usually called the fabulous Ages, and with regard to which, they own’d they had nothing certain to depend upon? Every body knows, that nothing can be more wild and romantick, or more irregular and confus’d, than the Pagan Mythology, and the Exploits and Miracles attributed to their Deities and Heroes; in which however they mightily differ from one another, attributing the same Things, now to one, now to another of their Deities. And if some of them bear a Resemblance to some of the miraculous Facts recorded in the Old Testament, it is not much to be wonder’d at; since it is

* P. 170.

is highly probable, they were owing to some obscure Reports or Traditions of those Facts that had spread amongst the Heathens. For the Writings of *Moses* were unquestionably more ancient than any of their Mythologists. But though there are Reports of some wonderful Facts from time to time both in false Histories and true, yet no Instance can be brought even from any of the fabulous Histories of the Pagans, much less from any credible Records reputed so by themselves, of such an amazing Continuation of glorious Miracles, pretended to be wrought by any of their fam'd Deities or Heroes, or in Attestation of any Law or System of Laws and Religion pretended to be deriv'd from Heaven, that can at all be brought into competition with what was done at the Establishment of the Jewish and Christian Revelation.

Having consider'd what this Writer offers to shew that Miracles are an uncertain Proof, not to be depended on ; I shall now consider the Attempt he makes to shew that Miracles are intirely usefess and needfess, and answer no valuable End at all. This Point he labours, p. 369*, & seq. The substance of his Argument is this : That those moral Obligations which of themselves are incumbent on all rational Creatures, are so evident to all Mankind, that they do not need and cannot receive any additional Confirmation from Miracles ; and as to Things not of a moral Nature, or which are in their own nature indifferent, Miracles cannot prove them neither, because God can give no arbitrary Precepts.

Let us consider this distinctly. And first as to things of a moral Nature, our Author in his whole reasoning on this Head, proceeds upon the Principles he had advanc'd concerning the Clearness of the Law of Nature ; that these moral Obligations
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* P. 335, &c.

are so evident, that they cannot possibly be made plainer than they already are to all Mankind ; and that all Men as naturally and necessarily concur in their Judgments concerning them, as they do in their Judgments concerning the Brightness of the Sun, or the Whiteness of Snow ; and thence he collects, that they do not need nor can receive any Confirmation from Miracles ; for *how can Men believe that on lesser Evidence, which they knew before to be certain on the greatest ?* p. 370*.

But I have shewn [Part I. Chap. V.] that the Author's Supposition here is contrary to plain Fact ; and therefore his Inference which is built upon it falls to the ground. Dr. Clark indeed says, in a Passage here cited by the Author, that " some " Doctrines are in their own Nature necessarily " and demonstrably true ; such as are all those " which concern the Obligation of plain moral " Precepts ; and these neither need nor can receive any stronger Proof from Miracles, than " what they have already (though not perhaps so " clearly indeed to all Capacities) from the Evidence of right Reason." He here represents them as *evident to right Reason*, that is, to Reason duly improv'd, and not darkned or perverted by vicious Prejudices ; but though they are evident to right Reason, they may not be so to those whose Reason is darkned and corrupted, and who are led aside and perverted by wrong Prejudices ; which is evidently the Case (and the Doctor proves it to be so) of the generality of Mankind ; and was in fact so in the Heathen World, when the Light of the Christian Revelation arose. And in such a case Miracles may be highly useful to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and to procure even those Doctrines, which of themselves, if duly consider'd, are very reasonable, a fair Examination and a due Reception. It cannot be denied,

nied, that notwithstanding the alledg'd Clearness of the Law of Nature, Men need to be instructed in the Precepts and Doctrines of Morality; and if Instruction may be useful to render those moral Precepts or Doctrines plainer to the Bulk of Mankind, than otherwise they would be, then Miracles may be also useful to give a Weight and a divine Authority to those Instructions.

Our Author tells us from Dr. *Clark*, that “ the moral part of our Saviour's Doctrine would have appear'd infallibly true, whether he had ever work'd Miracles or no.” That it would have been true, though no Miracles had been wrought to attest it, will easily be granted; for Miracles can't alter the Nature of Things, or make those Things true which were not so before; but I deny that it would have been submitted to and receiv'd by Mankind as true, as much without the Evidence of Miracles as with it; nor is it at all Dr. *Clark*'s Intention to insinuate this. It may justly be affirm'd that no part of our Saviour's Doctrine had more powerful Prejudices against it than the moral Part, if we take this in its just Extent, as comprehending the Duties we owe to God, our Neighbours, and our selves. Men wanted some extraordinary Methods to awaken and recover them from their Superstition and Idolatry confirm'd by the Prescription of many Ages, from their Sensuality and Impurity, from a too great Addictedness to Self and the Things of this present World, from their vicious Customs and deprav'd Habits. Whosoever attempts to bring in a pure and holy and self-denying Doctrine, obliging Men to a Life of Piety and Righteousness and universal Purity, and to abandon their vicious Courses and corrupt Lusts, must combat the darling Appetites, Passions, and Prejudices of Mankind. Mere cold Reason could not alone have overcome them. Nor
would

would a Pretence of a divine Authority and of a Message from God be much regarded in such a Case, without Miracles as the Credentials of a divine Mission. It was therefore very much owing to the extraordinary and amazing Works that accompanied the first Promulgation of Christianity, that even the moral part of our Saviour's Doctrine made such a wonderful Progress. If any of the Philosophers advanc'd just Notions on some of these Heads before, yet they wanted a sufficient Authority to give Force to their Instructions, and to engage the Attention of Mankind, and make their Notions pass for Laws. Thousands who would never have received or submitted even to the moral Part of our Saviour's Doctrine, if it had been barely argued after the manner of Philosophers, received and submitted to it for the sake of those extraordinary Attestations that accompanied it. To this it was very much owing that the Christian Doctrine in a short time prevail'd through a great Part of the then known World, without any worldly Thing to recommend it, and though it had all the Powers, the Allurements, and the Terrors of this World engag'd in opposition to it.

Dr. *Clark* had said, that "the rest of our Saviour's Doctrines [as distinguish'd from the moral Part of his Doctrine]" "was what evidently tended to promote the Honour of God and the Practice of Righteousness amongst Men; therefore that part of his Doctrine was possible, and very probable to be true, but yet it could not from thence be known to be certainly true, nor ought to have been receiv'd as a Revelation from God, unless it had been prov'd by undeniable Miracles." The Doctor by the *rest of our Saviour's Doctrines* as distinguish'd from the moral Part, evidently means the peculiar Articles of the Christian Faith as distinguish'd from the moral Precepts. These Articles have an evident Tendency

to promote the Honour of God and the Practice of Righteousness; but this Tendency alone would not have prov'd them true, or to be a Revelation from God, without the Attestation of Miracles. But our Author thinks, that "the Distinction between the moral Part of our Saviour's Doctrine, and that Part which evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, is manifestly a Distinction without any Difference, p. 372.*" For that "whatever evidently tends to promote the Honour of God and the Practice of Righteousness, is it self evidently moral, and is therefore certainly true, and we may be sure it is the Will of God." He finds fault with Dr. *Clark* for saying, that "no degree of Goodness and Excellency in the Doctrine it self can make it certain, but only highly probable to come from God." And he gives it on the contrary as the Opinion of the Deists, that "as evidently as God is not only a good and perfect, but also the only perfect Being, so evident is it, that every Doctrine, that carries any Degree, much more the highest Degree of Goodness and Perfection in it, has the Character of Divinity impress'd upon it." And he had said a little before, that "to suppose Mankind can't be certain of this till convinc'd of it by Miracles, is to strike at the Certainty of all Religion." This is the course of his Reasoning, p. 371, 372, 373. Thus our Author supposes the good Tendency of Doctrines to be a Proof of the Truth and Divinity of them; so that if it can be shewn, that they tend to promote the Honour of God and the Practice of Righteousness, they are certainly true and of a divine Original. This might be turn'd to the advantage of Christianity; since it might easily be shewn, that the peculiar Doctrines of the Gospel have a Tendency to promote the Honour of God, to be-

get in Men the highest Love and Reverence for the Deity, and to ingage them to the Practice of Righteousness; and then, according to our Author, this would be a sufficient Evidence of their Truth, and of their divine Original. But certainly this Writer is one of the first that ever attempted to prove the Truth of Things from their Tendency. Does not he himself suppose, that a Falseness may sometimes tend to the publick Good, p. 347 *. but does this prove that that Falseness is true?

What is more plain to the common Sense of Mankind, than that we can often easily see the Tendency of a Doctrine, that on Supposition of its being true it would have a good Effect; and yet this Tendency of it alone would never prove it actually true? Granting that, as our Author argues, *the whole of Religion consists in the Honour of God and the Good of Man*, all that can be gather'd from this is, that any Doctrine which evidently tends to promote these, tends to answer the End of Religion; but it does not follow that therefore that Doctrine is certainly true, especially if that Doctrine relates to Facts. When he urges it as a Thing evident, that "those Actions which
"tend to promote the Honour of God and the
"Practice of Righteousness, are plain moral Du-
"ties, and perpetually obligatory, p. 373 ||." This is nothing to the present Question between him and the Doctor, which is not about Actions or Precepts, but Doctrines; not whether the Practice of moral Duties be obligatory, (and all that the Author has on this Head here is wholly impertinent) but whether all those Doctrines and Representations of Facts are certainly true and to be believ'd as such, which tend to promote the Practice of Morality. Thus, *e. g.* that God in pity to the Ignorance and Corruption of Mankind, sent his Son from Heaven to bring Men to a sense of their
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their Duty ; to reclaim them from Vice and Superstition and Idolatry ; to give them a bright Example in his own Practice of every amiable Grace and Virtue ; to make Atonement for their Sins, and to assure them of the Pardon of them, how numerous and heinous soever upon their Repentance ; and to give them the certain Promise of eternal Life, as the glorious Reward of their sincere though imperfect Obedience ; and as a Pledge of this, to rise himself from the Grave, and ascend visibly into Heaven, &c. There is nothing in all this, but what, supposing it true, is highly for the Honour of God, and agreeable to his infinite Goodness, and for the Good of Mankind ; and which would have a manifest Tendency to promote the Practice of Righteousness and true Religion in the World. But would this alone prove, that such a Person is actually sent for these excellent Purposes ? Would the good Tendency of this prove that it is really Fact ? This Author would be one of the first to laugh at any one that should argue at this rate. But if Persons professing to be extraordinarily sent of God, should not only teach Doctrines, which supposing them true are of a good Tendency, but should in Testimony and as a Confirmation of their divine Mission, be enabled to perform Miracles, Works of an extraordinary Nature, evidently transcending all human Power and Skill ; then this proves that they had the extraordinary Assistance of a superior Being or Beings ; and these could not be evil Spirits, who would never give countenance to Doctrines, which by the Supposition have an excellent Tendency to promote the Glory of God and the Good of Mankind. It must therefore be owing to the interposition of a good Being or Beings, that is, either God himself immediately, or Beings that must be suppos'd to act in conformity to his Will, and under

der his Direction. And it cannot be suppos'd, that either God himself, or any good Spirits by his Direction, should interpose in an extraordinary manner, to confirm and carry on an Imposture, or affix his royal Seal and Attestations to a Lye, even though we should suppose the Fiction to have a good Tendency. For would it not be as easy for God to give a true divine Mission, and then attest and confirm it, immediately by himself, or mediately by the Agency of inferior good Beings acting under his Direction, as to employ the same Power to attest a false one? If Men, through Impotency and Weakness, think themselves sometimes oblig'd to have recourse to Falshood and Deceit for good Ends, (which this Writer thinks very lawful) because they think they cannot equally obtain those Ends without it; an omnipotent Being can never be under this Necessity. And therefore, if he chuses to set his own Attestation to an Imposture, 'tis because he chuses to govern Men by a Lye, when he might answer the same End by a Truth; a Conduct that is absolutely irreconcilable with the Idea of a God of infinite Wisdom, Goodness, and Truth.

As our Author endeavours to shew, that Miracles can be of no use with respect to Doctrines of a moral Nature and Tendency, the contrary of which has been prov'd; so with respect to things not of a moral Nature, or which are in their own nature indifferent, he asserts that Miracles cannot prove them; and his Reasoning on this Head proceeds all upon the Supposition, that God cannot give any positive Precepts, for this would be *to act arbitrarily and of mere Wilfulness*, as he expresses it, p. 370*. And it is true, if God cannot give any such Precepts, Miracles cannot prove them. But the supposition is false, and has been already

* P. 335.

already confuted, see *Vol. 1. Chap. 4.* I add, that if in a Religion professing to come from God, the Design and Tendency of which is unquestionably noble and excellent, and which is confirm'd by a Series of the most glorious uncontrolled Miracles, there should be some Doctrines attended with Difficulties which we are not well able to explain, we must be obliged to receive those Doctrines among the rest, as making up a part of a Revelation, the whole of which comes to us so gloriously attested and confirm'd; and to reject that Religion with all the bright Evidence, and the illustrious Attestations supposed to accompany it, merely on the account of the Difficulties attending some of its Doctrines, which yet cannot be proved to be impossible, would be a very unreasonable Conduct. For nothing is more reasonable than to suppose, that in a Revelation coming from God, some parts of which relate to things out of our reach, and which we could not have known but by such a Discovery, there may be some things which we cannot easily account for, through the Narrowness of our Understandings, and which yet must be received as true on the Authority of God, from-whom that Revelation came.

I would only further observe, that after all the pains this Gentleman has taken to shew, that Miracles can be of no use at all, he himself seems plainly to grant, that they may be of excellent use, and may answer a very valuable Purpose, when he asks in the Name of the Deists, p. 374 *, "How
" can Miracles have any other Use, than to make
" Men consider the Nature and Tendency of a
" Doctrine, and judge from thence whether it be
" from God?" And is not this a signal Advantage arising from Miracles, when it is want of Attention and Consideration, that is one of the chief Diseases

Diseases of the human Nature, and one great Cause of the general Ignorance of Mankind, and of the Neglect of their Duty? But I further ask, since our Author represents the Deists as owning, that Miracles may be of use to make Men consider the Nature and Tendency of a Doctrine, and judge from thence whether it be from God; I ask, wherein this Tendency of Miracles, to make Men consider the Nature of a Doctrine, does consist? Or, what there is in Miracles that engages them to consider? I can't conceive upon what Foundation this can be said, or how Miracles can have this Use and Effect, except upon a Supposition, that some Miracles at least are Signs of the Interposition of a Divine Power, and are, as it were, the Voice of God to Mankind; and what Men regard as the Voice of God, they will always think merits a particular Attention. But if no Miracles in any Case, can be regarded as the Signs and Evidences of a Divine Interposition, why should Men think them worth minding at all, or be thereby engaged to give Attention to the Doctrines thus attested? This Concession intimates, that there is something in Miracles, which naturally tends to bespeak the Attention and Regard of Mankind, and to lead them to acknowledge the peculiar Operation of God; and if so, they must needs give a weight to the Doctrine when consider'd, as well as engage Men to consider it; and must give it a much greater Force and Authority, than the same Doctrine would have without them.

The last Effort this Author makes on the Head of Miracles, is a very weak one, and looks like a giving up of the Cause. "Allowing (says he) the Doctor what Hypothesis he pleases in relation to Miracles, yet, if the Doctrines themselves, from their internal Excellency, do not give us a certain Proof of the Will of God, no traditional
" Miracles

“ Miracles can do it, because one Probability added to another will not amount to a Certainty, p. 374 *.” But surely one Probability added to another will increase the Probability; and many probable Arguments together will form a Proof, which though not amounting to what may be call’d a strict and absolute Certainty or demonstrative Evidence, yet comes so near it, as to be sufficient to determine the Judgment and Practice of reasonable Beings; and those would be highly unreasonable, that would in such a Case refuse their Assent. A great Probability is the utmost we can arrive at in most things. One would think this Author supposes it only highly probable that there is a Deity, but not absolutely certain, when he says, p. 372 †, “ that ’tis possible a Man may doubt whether there is a God; but none sure who believe one can doubt, but that ’tis demonstrably fit for Men to do every thing that evidently tends to promote the Honour of God, and the Practice of Righteousness.” Where he represents the latter as much more certain than the former, or rather, the latter as undeniably and demonstrably certain, the former as no more than highly probable; for absolute Certainty admits of no Degrees. Though therefore it should be granted, that the excellent Tendency of the Doctrines themselves, in conjunction with the Attestation of Miracles, only makes it highly probable (not absolutely certain with the highest Degree of Certainty) that those Doctrines came from God; this would infer an Obligation upon Mankind to believe and to receive them, and they could not refuse to do it without the just Imputation of inexcusable Guilt and Folly.

Upon the whole, if we take the whole Evidence together, brought for the Scripture-Revelation;

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if we consider the internal Marks and Characters of Goodness and Purity, which are to be found there, and the excellent Tendency of the whole, to promote the Glory of God and the Practice of Righteousness; if we consider the Character of the Persons, by whom this Revelation was first publish'd and communicated to the World, and whose Testimony has all the Marks of Credibility that can be reasonably requir'd in any Testimony whatsoever: And if we add to this, the numerous uncontrolled Miracles, which they were enabled to perform as Proofs of their Divine Mission, and which were a Series of Works so grand and glorious, and which have such Characters of Divinity, that it is scarce possible not to regard them as the Works of God, proceeding from the great Maker and Governor of the Universe, and which we cannot therefore suppose, a wise and good Providence would suffer to be wrought in Attestation of an Imposture, at least, without controlling or overruling them by superior Miracles: To which may be join'd the Attestation of Prophecies, which affords a further illustrious Proof of the Interposition of a Deity: Taking all this together, it must be said, that the Revelation contain'd in the sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament, has all the Evidence that could be supposed to accompany a Revelation really coming from God, and that therefore we are obliged to receive it as such. Nor can I see what further Proof and Evidence Mankind could reasonably desire, than has been given in this Case; or that any Evidence could be given to prove that any Revelation came from God, but what might be as reasonably objected against as this; and those that demand more, would probably be as little satisfy'd with any other Evidence that could be produced.



CHAP. IV.

That we have all the Evidence that can reasonably be desir'd, that the Revelation contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, with the main Facts and Attestations by which that Revelation was originally confirm'd and establish'd, is transmitted to us with such a degree of Purity and Certainty, as may be safely depended on. And this is particularly shewn, with regard to the Revelation contain'd in the Old Testament, especially the Law of Moses.

HAVING consider'd what the Author has to offer against the original Proofs of the Scripture-Revelation, I now proceed to consider the Objections he makes against the Conveyance of that Revelation to us.

Supposing an extraordinary Revelation to have been really given from God, for the Instruction of Mankind, in things which it is of importance to them to know, and that this Revelation was design'd, not merely for the Use of that Age in which it was first given, but for succeeding Ages; all that could be reasonably expected in such a Case is, that as that Revelation should be amply attested when it was first given, so both the Revelation itself, and an Account of the Evidences and miraculous Attestations whereby it was originally confirm'd, should be transmitted to future Times in authentick Monuments, in such a manner, and with such a degree of Evidence, as all Mankind count it reasonable to admit in any other Case.

It

It cannot be justly expected, that God should continually send new Revelations, to assure us that he had given such a Revelation, and should repeat the same Facts and work the same Miracles over again for our Conviction, or confirm our Belief of the first Miracles by new ones in every Age. At this rate it must not be believed that Christ appeared on Earth, and perform'd such wonderful Works, and rose again from the Dead, except he appear again on Earth, and repeat his Miracles and his Resurrection in every Age and every Nation; yea, and for the Conviction of every single Person. For one Nation and one Man has as much Right to demand this as another. How unreasonable is this? Miracles are not to be multiplied without Necessity. And indeed if once they became so common, they would lose their Effect, and be no longer regarded as Miracles, but as Things of course. Nor is it to be supposed, that God will interpose in an extraordinary way to assure us of the Truth of Facts, when the ordinary way is sufficient, as it manifestly is in the present Case. The way that all Mankind depend upon for knowing past Facts is by Tradition; and that either by oral Tradition, which may serve to preserve the Remembrance of some principal Facts, but is not much to be depended on for an exact Conveyance of Laws, Doctrines, &c. or by authentick Records written at the time when the Facts were done, and the Laws given. And all the World owns, that these may in many Cases be so circumstanced, that we cannot reasonably doubt of the Facts and the Laws so transmitted. And this is the Case of the Mosaick and Christian Revelation. Both the one and the other was committed to writing, and comes to us transmitted in authentick Records, which have all the Marks of Guineness and Credibility, that any Writings can possibly

possibly have. There we have an Account of the Revelation itself, its Doctrines and Laws, and find it to be such as bears upon it the bright Characters of the Divine Goodness and Purity, and contains the most useful Discoveries; in a word, such a Revelation as the State of Mankind requir'd. And we have also an Account of the extraordinary miraculous Facts by which that Revelation was originally attested and confirm'd; and these Accounts were written in the very Age when those Facts were done, and by Persons who themselves were Witnesses of them. And this is all that can reasonably be desir'd. For to insist upon our being Eye-witnesses to Facts done at a considerable distance of time from our Age, is perfectly unreasonable, and is to insist on a manifest Impossibility.

Our Author, in opposition to all this, does not offer any direct Proof to invalidate the Credit of those Records, but contents himself with scattering Suspicions and doubtful Hints, that shew rather the Inclination he had to believe that they were corrupted, than that he was able to prove them so. And indeed most of the things he offers on this Head, if they had any Force in them, would prove that no ancient Writings or Accounts at all are to be depended on, or can be transmitted to us with such a degree of Certainty and Integrity as may be sufficient to satisfy a reasonable Mind.

Thus he tells us in one place, p. 185 *. that
“ the very Nature of Probability is such, that were
“ it only left to Time itself, even that would wear
“ it quite out; ” and that some Mathematicians
have pretended to demonstrate, “ that the Proba-
“ bility of Facts depending on human Testimony,
“ must gradually lessen in proportion to the Di-
“ stance of the Time when they were done; ” for
which

* P. 163.

which he cites *Craig's Principia Mathematica Theologiae Christianae*. But I must own I can hardly think this Author himself seriously believes, that in all Cases the Evidence of Facts that were transacted some time ago, constantly decreases in every Age. Will any Man pretend, that we may not be as certain now that there was such a Man as *Alexander the Great*, and that he conquer'd the *Persian Empire*, or that there was such a Man as *Cicero* or *Virgil*, who were the Authors of such and such Books which are still extant, as if we had lived five hundred Years ago; or that our Posterity a hundred Years hence, may not have as full Evidence of this, and as great Certainty about it, as we have now? And any one that would pretend that we grow every day less sure of this, would deserve to be laugh'd at or pitied. The Probability of Facts must be tried by other Rules, than merely the Distance of Time from the Age in which they were transacted, since it may often happen, that we have little or no Certainty of Things that were done but a few Years since, and may on the other hand have such Evidence concerning things done several Ages ago, that it would be a ridiculous Scepticism to deny or doubt of it.

Our Author seems to lay a great Stress, p. 294, 324*. on the Custom that has obtain'd in Courts of Judicature, of not admitting the Copy of a Record, though taken from the Original, without the Oath of a disinterested Person of his having compar'd it; and from thence infers, "How then
 " can we absolutely depend, in Things of the
 " greatest Moment, on voluminous Writings,
 " which have been so often transcrib'd by Men
 " who never saw the Original, and Men too who
 " even in the earliest Times, if we may judge
 " by the great number of forg'd Passages, and
 " even

* P. 266, 293.

“even forg’d Books, would scruple no pious Frauds?” As to the pretence of pious Frauds, it shall be consider’d afterwards. At present I only ask, whether he pretends to lay it down for a Rule, that we cannot be certain of any Books or Writings whatsoever, except we have the Testimony of living Witnesses that saw the Copies transcrib’d from the original Manuscripts? Would not this be at once to destroy the Credit of all the admir’d Writings of the Ancients? What would our Author himself think of a Man that should be for discarding the Writings of *Cicero, Virgil, Tacitus*, &c. as Forgeries not to be depended on, and assign no other Reason for it but that the original Manuscripts are not now in being, nor is any Man now alive, or has been for some Ages, that saw them, or could testify that the present Copies were faithfully transcrib’d from them? I am pretty sure that notwithstanding this, our Author has no doubt that these are their genuine Writings, and that they come to us with such a degree of Certainty and Evidence, as may be justly depended on, and without any such material Corruption as destroys their Credit or their Usefulness. Why therefore should he not suppose that this may also be the case of the sacred Writings? Why should the want of the original Manuscripts be objected in the one Case as a Proof their Uncertainty, more than in the other? Or does he proceed by different Weights and Measures, and think that to be a sufficient Objection when produc’d against the Scripture-Records, which he himself would expose and despise, if produc’d against any other?

Though in Judicature none but the attested Copy of a Record will be admitted as a good Proof, and the Copy of a Copy never so well attested will not be admitted, as this Writer cites it from *Mr. Locke*, p. 294. it does not follow, that therefore it is not

reasonable to admit it in any other Case, or that no Writing can be depended on that has been frequently transcrib'd. The Rules and Forms of Courts are not to be observ'd in all Cases, and particularly it is impossible to put them in practice with relation to ancient Writings. And he would be justly censur'd and despis'd as a very impertinent Critick, that should pretend to judge of their Genuineness by these Rules, and reject all Writings as uncertain, and not to be depended on, which do not admit of this kind of Proof. I think it may be affirm'd, that we may have such moral Evidence of the Truth and Certainty of some Writings, of which yet we cannot shew the Originals or an attested Copy, that in Reason seems to carry a greater Force with it to satisfy an impartial Mind, than the single Oath of a living Witness, which yet would be admitted in Judicature as a sufficient Proof. Thus, *e. g.* supposing that soon after a Book was written, many Copies of it were taken by different Hands, that they were immediately dispers'd into different Countries, and other Copies taken from them in great Numbers, translated into several Languages, in different Parts of the World, and all agreeing in the main; I think in this Case the Evidence arising by comparing these several Copies, would yield a far stronger Proof than if a single living Witness testified that he saw a Copy taken from the Original, and compar'd the one with the other, because it may be suppos'd that such a living Witness might say or swear he compar'd them, when he did not, and might design to put a Forgery upon the World: But where many Copies were taken by different Hands, and immediately dispers'd into different Nations, it can scarce be conceived they should be all Forgeries. It might be expected indeed, there would be smaller Differences between

between them, which could scarce be avoided in Things frequently transcrib'd ; but as it would be for the most part easy to rectify those Mistakes, by a diligent comparing the several Copies, so they would only confirm their Agreement in the main.

I need not take much notice of the Author's general Harangues about the Uncertainty of Tradition, which are only fitted to work upon those that are carried away by mere Sounds. 'Tis evident, and this Writer knows it, that all Tradition is not alike uncertain. There is a true and a false Tradition ; there is a Tradition that may be justly doubted or denied, and there is a Tradition that may be safely depended on : but he never thinks proper to distinguish these, and particularly never distinguishes between oral and written Tradition, though there is a vast difference between the one and the other in point of Certainty ; but represents all kinds of Tradition as equally uncertain. He insinuates, that *Tradition in no Case can be a faithful Conveyancer*, p. 246 *, when the contrary is evident, and agreed to by all Mankind ; that there are some Things which we receive by Tradition (as are all Things of which we our selves were not Witnesses, or which were not done in the very Age in which we live) which yet we may be as certain of, as of any thing whatsoever. It is by Tradition, taken in this large Sense, that we have all our Records and all our Laws ; 'tis by Tradition we have all the Histories of former Ages, and all the Books and Writings of ancient Times. And is it enough to prove all these uncertain, to say we have 'em only by Tradition ? If a Man should take it into his head, to call all our Laws traditionary Laws, and all our Records traditionary Records, and all the moral Writings transmitted from Antiquity traditionary Morals, and all histo-

rical Accounts, even the most authentick, traditional Reports; would this alone be sufficient to blast the Credit of them, and prove that none of these can be depended on? Yet this is a way of talking this Gentleman seems to value himself upon, and which he makes use of on all Occasions. He often repeats the Words *traditional Religion, traditional Revelation, traditional Reports of Miracles, &c.* This may perhaps pass with unthinking People; for Tradition is a word of an ill Sound; and most Men when they hear of *traditional Reports*, are apt to form to themselves an Idea of some uncertain Rumours and Tales, a Report of which by oral Tradition has reach'd our Age. And it will be easily own'd, that in Matters depending only on *the Hearsay of an Hearsay, each Remove from the Original weakens the Force of the Proof*, and that *the more Hands such a Report by Hearsay has successively pass'd through, the less Strength and Evidence does it receive from them*; as Mr. Locke observes in a Passage quoted by our Author, p. 294*. And hence it is, that *traditional Reports* is an Epithet seldom given to authentick credible Histories. But if instead of calling 'em *traditional Reports of Miracles*, he had said, they were Accounts of Miracles transmitted to us in Records, written in the Age in which those Miracles were publickly wrought, and by credible Persons, who were themselves Witnesses of what they wrote; it would have immediately appear'd, that those Accounts might be depended on, though they are deriv'd to us by Tradition: but then this Author would have lost his Aim, which was, under this Idea, to insinuate that those Accounts are absolutely uncertain, and in no wise to be depended on.

He asks, p. 246 ||, "supposing Prophets and
"Apostles impeccable as well as infallible, yet
"what

“ what Certainty can People have, that these
“ Things which were taught by them, have
“ been faithfully convey’d down for many Gene-
“ rations together, by Men who were far from
“ being impeccable as well as infallible?” This
Arguing depends upon this Principle, that we can
be certain of nothing that is convey’d through the
hands of Men that are fallible and peccable; a Po-
sition so strange, that these Gentlemen would suf-
ficiently ridicule it, if applied to any other Sub-
ject, or advanced on any other Occasion. Our
Author is pleas’d to mention the Rules and Prac-
tice of Courts of Judicature, as Things that are
founded on Reason. And does not the Practice of
all Courts of Judicature among all Nations pro-
ceed upon this Foundation, that the Testimony of
Persons that are fallible and peccable (for such are
all Mankind) may in many Cases be depended on
as a certain Proof? I only know by the Testimony
of fallible and peccable Men, that there is such
a Place as *Paris* or *Rome*, for I was never there;
and yet I am as certain that there are such Cities,
as if I had seen them my self. All the World
owns, that we may in many Cases have a Security
sufficient to satisfy any reasonable Man, that Wri-
tings are faithfully transmitted to us, with such a
degree of Purity and Incorruption, that the Sense
of them may be depended on, though they all
come to us through the Hands of peccable and
fallible Persons; and this, I doubt not, is our Au-
thor’s Sentiment with respect to many of the cele-
brated Writings, of the Ancients, of which he pro-
fesses himself so great an Admirer. And I think
it is no hard Matter to shew, that we have great-
er Evidences of the Scriptures being faithfully
transmitted to us, than we have concerning any
other ancient Writings, and that an universal
Corruption of them would be much more diffi-
cult.

It cannot therefore be a sufficient Reason for doubting whether the Scriptures are faithfully convey'd to us, merely that they have been convey'd through the Hands of fallible and peccable Men; except some more particular Reasons can be assign'd to shew, that the Tradition by which the Scripture is convey'd, is not to be depended on; and though I might let the Matter rest here, till the Author is pleas'd to produce his particular Objections, yet the better to enlighten this Subject, I shall take this occasion to offer something to shew, what just Grounds we have for a reasonable Assurance, that the sacred Writings are faithfully transmitted to us.

And first with regard to the Writings of the Old Testament; the first that comes to be consider'd is the Law of *Moses*, for if the Authority of this be acknowledged, the rest will not be much contested. And I think we have all the Evidence that can be reasonably desir'd, and sufficient to satisfy any unprejudic'd Enquirer, both that the Laws deliver'd by *Moses*, and the illustrious Facts by which those Laws were attested, are transmitted to us, without any such material Corruption or Alteration, as to destroy the Credit of them.

That there was such a Man as *Moses*, and that he was the Law-giver of the Jews, who gave them the Body of Laws by which their Nation was govern'd, admits of as clear an Evidence as any Fact whatsoever. It was known and acknowledg'd by the Heathens; the most obstinate Enemies of the Jews, among those that lived nearest those Times, never pretended to deny it; the Jews themselves to whom those Laws were given, and whose whole Religion and Polity depended upon those Laws and were founded in them, constantly affirm'd it; and surely every Nation must be allow'd proper Vouchers for their own Laws; not indeed

indeed for the Divinity of them; this must be tried and judg'd by other Arguments; but that these are their Laws, and that such a Person was their Law-giver, from whom they receiv'd those Laws.

If we examine the Records of the Jewish Nation, we shall find them still in possession of those Laws from the very Time in which they were given. And though the People often fell into a Neglect of those Laws, being infected with the corrupt Customs of the neighbouring Nations; yet they never universally and totally apostatiz'd from the Law of *Moses*, but still acknowledg'd its Sacredness and divine Authority.

Josbua, *Moses*'s Successor, and who conquer'd the Land of *Canaan*, commanded the *Israelites* to do all that is written in the Law of *Moses*, *Jos.* 23. 6. and after his Death they were for many Years govern'd by Judges, heroick Men rais'd up from time to time, who as they deliver'd their Country from Servitude, so they asserted the Authority of the Law of *Moses*, and when the People degenerated into Idolatry, restored the true Worship of God among them according to that Law.

When afterwards they had Kings, those Kings never pretended to bring in a new Body of Laws; but still made those of *Moses* the Rule of their Government, by which their civil and sacred Polity was regulated. King *David* was himself the Author of many admirable Composures, in which he takes all Occasions to express his ardent Zeal for the Laws deliver'd by *Moses*, and his high Esteem for them; and he left a Charge to his Son *Solomon*, to keep *God's Laws and Statutes and Commandments*, as it is written in the Law of *Moses*, *1 Kings* 2. 3. Others of their Kings, when the People were degenerated and grown corrupt, bound themselves and the People by solemn Oath to observe the

Law; as particularly was done in the Reign of *Aſa*, 2 *Chron.* 14. 4. 15. 12—15. And *Jehoſhaphat*, when he ſent Judges throughout the Land, order'd them to carry Copies of the Law along with them, 2 *Chron.* 17. 9. The Jews had indeed ſome wicked and idolatrous Kings, under whom the pure Worſhip of God according to the Law was neglected; but theſe were ſucceeded by good ones, who reformed Church and State with exemplary Care and Diligence, and in this Reformation ſtill proceeded by the Rule of the Law of *Mofes*; as is particularly remark'd concerning *Hezekiah*, who ſucceeded *Ahaz* a wicked Prince, 2 *Chron.* 30. 16, &c.

'Tis true that in the Reign of his Son *Manaſſeh*, the publick Idolatry and Corruption ſeem'd to be carried to a greater Height than ever it was before, ſo that *Joaſiah* found an univerſal Diſorder; the Worſhip of God, as preſcrib'd by the Law, neglected; but then he ſet himſelf with an eminent Zeal to reſtore it. In his Time, as they were repairing the Temple, *Hilkiah* the High-Prieſt found the Book of the Law there, which cannot be reaſonably underſtood of any other than the authentick Copy of the Law, which was commanded by *Mofes* himſelf to be depoſited in the Side of the Ark of the Covenant, Deut. 31. 26. And there is no Reaſon to ſuppoſe that ever it had been taken from thence. In all the Calamities of the Jews in the times of their Judges, the Ark of the Lord ſtill continued undiſturb'd, till the *Philiftines* took it; and they ſoon reſtor'd it with all that belong'd to it, as being ſufficiently terrified with the Judgments that had befallen them. And we may be ſure that after it was reſtor'd, none of the Jews would preſume to take away any thing that was depoſited there; eſpecially when they knew the Punishment inflicted on the *Bethſhemites*, and afterwards

wards on *Uzzab*, for their Rashness. It was afterwards deposited in the Temple in the most holy Place, and we don't find that any of their most wicked Princes presum'd to remove it. There is therefore all the Reason in the World to think, that as the Ark continued safe till the Time of *Josiah*, so the original Copy of the Law continued still there, where it was first deposited. In his Time the Ark was taken out of the holy Place, while the Temple was repair'd and clean'd, as may be gather'd from what *Josiah* said to the Levites afterwards, 2 *Chron.* 35. 3. *Put the holy Ark in the House which Solomon the Son of David King of Israel did build.* From whence it is natural to suppose, that *Hilkiab* the High-Priest had himself remov'd the Ark, while the Temple and the most holy Place was repair'd. And it is most probable, that on that Occasion he took the authentick Book of the Law from the Sides of the Ark where it was deposited, and brought it to *Josiah*; which because of its venerable Antiquity and Authority, made the King more particularly consider it than ever he had done before. And this may account for the Surprize and Concern he express'd, when that Book of the Law was read to him.

If we should grant what some are willing to suppose, that the Book of the Law found by *Hilkiab* in the Temple was the only Copy then extant, yet still this certainly proves, that there was an authentick Copy of the Law then in being, and deposited in the Temple, which was universally look'd upon by King and People as the genuine Law of *Moses*; and according to which he proceeded to regulate his Government and the whole State; and that it was not destroyed or lost even in the long wicked Reign of *Manasseh*, and amidst all the Confusions that then happened. This may be certainly concluded from the Story, which

way soever you take it. But after all, it does not appear that there was no other Copy of the Law then extant. *Josiah*, even before the finding out of the Book of the Law in the Temple, had already begun a Reformation in the publick Worship, conformably to that Law. And as it is reasonable to suppose, that there were then, and had been all along many pious Persons among the *Jews*, (for when *Israel* was most corrupt, and *Elias* thought he stood alone, yet there were 7000 Men that were sincere Worshippers of the Deity, and we have reason to think there were far greater Numbers in *Judab*, even in the Times of their greatest Degeneracy) so it can scarce be imagin'd that none of them all, of the People, Priests, or *Levites*, had Copies of the Law amongst them, which every pious *Jew* look'd upon himself to be under the highest Obligation to study and observe; according to the Description *David* gives of a good Man, *Psal.* 1. 2. Add to this, that there was a Succession of Prophets all along, whose Business it was to oppose the growing Corruptions of the Times, and preserve the Purity of Religion amongst them. These Prophets not only all along suppose the Divine Authority of the Law of *Moses*, but that this Law was known among the People; since they frequently blame them for placing their Religion merely in a punctual Observance of the ritual Injunctions prescrib'd in that Law, whilst they neglected the moral Precepts of it.

And if, as is very probable, the Copies of the Law were grown very scarce among the People, when *Josiah* began his Reformation, yet we have all the Reason in the World to think, that that excellent and zealous Prince, who not only bound himself, but all the People in *Jerusalem* and *Benjamin*, by a solemn Oath or Covenant, to keep *God's Commandments, and Statutes, and Judgments,*

as written in the Book of the Law, 2 Chron. 34. 31, 32. would take care that many Copies of the Law should be transcrib'd and corrected from the Original found in the Temple, and so render'd far more frequent among the People, than they had been before. And it was but a few Years after his Death, that the *Babylonish* Captivity happen'd. At which time therefore, it is scarce to be doubted, there were still many Copies of the Law in several hands; and that some of those that were carried captive, had Copies of the Law with them, which they would be careful to preserve; especially, since they expected, according to an express Promise that was made them in the Name of God, that they should be restored to their own Land, and their former State again. And it is plain from many Instances, that the *Jews* in the Captivity of *Babylon*, continued still to observe their own Laws and Customs. *Daniel* had a Copy of the Law in *Babylon*, as is evident from *Dan.* 9. 11, 12, 13. where he saith, *All Israel have transgressed thy Law, &c. therefore the Curse is poured upon us, and the Oath that is written in the Law of Moses, the Servant of God. And he hath confirmed his Words which he hath spoken against us, as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this Evil is come upon us.* It appears that the People had been careful to preserve their Genealogies in the Captivity, of which we have a particular Account, *Ezra* 2. *Neb.* 7. this shew'd their great Care in the time of the Captivity, to keep themselves distinct, in prospect of returning to their own Land. And would they not be much more careful to preserve the Law of *Moses*, which was to be the Rule, according to which they were to be govern'd, and by which their publick Worship was to be regulated? Accordingly we find, that when a considerable Body of the *Jews* return'd to their own Land, pursuant to the Decree of Cy-

rus, under the Conduct of Zerubbabel and Jeshua the High-Priest, they immediately set themselves to re-establish the ancient Worship there, according to the Law of Moses. They built an Altar soon after their Return, and offered Sacrifices thereon, as it is written in the Law of Moses, the Man of God, Ezra 3. 2. They kept the Feast of Tabernacles, as it is written, and all the new Moons, and set Feasts, and offered the proper Sacrifices, in each, according to what is prescribed in that Law; see ver. 4, 5. They kept the Passover in a solemn manner, Chap. 6. 19. All this was before Ezra came; which evidently shews, both that they had the Law of Moses amongst them before Ezra's coming, and that by this they regulated their Worship. Nothing therefore can be more absurd or unreasonable, than that Fiction, in the second Apocryphal Book of *Esdra*s (though too rashly believed by some of the Fathers) that all the Copies of the Law were destroy'd and lost in the Captivity; and that *Ezra* restor'd it by immediate Inspiration. A Story which however senseless, and without the least Foundation, the Enemies of Revelation greedily catch at, that they may conclude from thence, that *Ezra* corrupted the Law, and put his own Inventions upon the People for the Law of Moses.

If we consider several Passages in *Artaxerxes's* Commission to *Ezra*, we shall find, that they all suppose the Law of Moses to be then extant, and well known to be so. *Artaxerxes King of Kings, unto Ezra the Priest, a Scribe of the Law of the God of Heaven, perfect Peace, &c. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the King and of his seven Counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the Law of thy God which is in thine Hand. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of Heaven, let it be diligently done for the House of the God of Heaven:*

ven: For why should there be Wrath against the Realm of the King and of his Sons? And thou Ezra, after the Wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set Magistrates and Judges, which may judge all the People, that are beyond the River, all such as know the Laws of thy God, [where it is plainly supposed, that there were many among the Jews that knew the Law] and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the Law of thy God, and the Law of the King, let Judgment be executed upon him speedily, &c. Ezra 7. 12, 14, 23, 25, 26. It appears from hence, that Ezra's Commission extended no further than the regulating Things according to the Law of Moses, which plainly supposes it as a Thing well known what that Law was, and that it was then in being. He is describ'd under this Character, that he was a ready Scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given, Chap. 7. 6. And besides him, there were many other considerable Men among the Jews that knew the Law, and were well acquainted with it. Ezra had many Enemies, not only amongst the Samaritans, who were ever ready to find fault, but amongst the Jews, many of whom were much displeased with him for obliging them to put away their strange Wives; a Thing in which great Numbers of the People, and of the Nobles, and Priests too, were concern'd. If therefore it had not been very well known, that the Laws he requir'd them to observe, were the same that had been given by Moses, and by which their Nation had been anciently govern'd; if Ezra had attempted to make any considerable Alteration in the Body of those Laws, or to have put new Inventions of his own upon the People instead of them; as this would have been a transgressing the Commission that was given him, there would not have been wanting many to have complain'd of it, who would not have

have fail'd to represent it to the King with Aggravations. Besides this, there was a considerable Body of the *Jews* that still remain'd at *Babylon*, probably the richest and greatest Men of their Nation, and many of them in eminent Posts and Stations; these had the Book of the Law of *Moses* among them; so *Daniel* had, as I have already shewn, and the same may be justly supposed concerning many others of them. They still kept to their own Rites and Laws, which gave occasion to *Haman* to represent them to *Abasuerus*, as a strange kind of People, *scattered abroad in all the Provinces of his Empire*, whose *Laws were diverse from all People*, and who did not *keep the King's Laws*, *Esth.* 3. 8. And could *Ezra* impose a new Law, and new Constitutions of his own Invention upon them too, dispersed as they were throughout the whole Empire, for the Laws of *Moses*?

Nehemiah came several Years after *Ezra* to *Jerusalem*, with a new Commission from the King of *Persia*, a Man of Note and Quality, well skill'd in the Law of *Moses*, and who appears from his whole Conduct, to have been a Person of great Probity, and Love to his Country. Would he not have discover'd the Cheat, if *Ezra* had introduced it? Yet we find he set himself with a remarkable Zeal to compleat the Reformation and Establishment which *Ezra* had begun. He met with considerable Opposition, both from the *Samaritans*, and from the great Men among the *Jews*, who had given into several Abuses which they were loth to have rectify'd; nor would they have submitted to his Regulations, if they had not been convinced that he acted according to the Law. In his time, the People, Priests, Levites, and Chief of the Nobles bound themselves by a solemn Oath and Covenant, to *walk in God's Law which was given by Moses the Servant of God, and to observe and*

and do all the Commandments of the Lord, and his Statutes, and his Judgments, as there prescrib'd, *Nebem. 10. 28, 29, &c.* The solemn Confession then made in the Name and Presence of all the People by the *Levites*, after the publick reading of the Law, is very remarkable; as it contains an Abridgment of the chief Facts recorded in the Law of *Moses*; an Acknowledgment of the great Things God had done for them, and of their own Iniquities, and those of their Fathers; which are all mention'd in this admirable publick Confession and Prayer, as things which the People were well acquainted with, and the Memory of which was still preserved amongst them, *Neb. 9.*

From that Time the *Jews* continued to be govern'd by the Law of *Moses*, and met with little Disturbance in it till the Days of *Antiochus Epiphanes*, who caused as many of the Books of the Law as fell into his hands, to be destroy'd. But many of them were still preserv'd. The *Jews* rose up in Vindication of their own Liberties. And from that time the Copies of the Law became very frequent, especially as it was, about this time or before, translated into the *Greek* Language, which occasion'd its being generally dispers'd. And I believe none will pretend, that after this Time a general Corruption or Alteration of that Law was a possible thing.

Thus we can trace the Law of *Moses* through all the Accounts and Records of that Nation, from the very Time in which it was given, and find it still in Being, and constantly referr'd to as the Rule of their Government, their civil and religious Polity. And indeed never was there any Law, concerning which greater Care was taken to keep it uncorrupted. There was all possible Provision made for this in the Law itself. It was not to be confin'd in the hands of the Priests or Governors,

but all the People were expressly and solemnly commanded to read and consider it frequently, and teach it their Children. And every Man was taught to think, that his own Happiness and Title to the Favour of God, depended upon knowing and practising it. To read and study this Law, was to be the proper Business of every seventh Day, set apart from their common Occupations. It was to be read to the whole Nation, when assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles every seventh Year. The Original of the Law was deposited in the Ark, the most sacred Place. The King himself was to write out a Copy of it. One whole Tribe, that of *Levi*, was set apart to teach this Law, and for that purpose, dispersed through all the Tribes. They had Prophets, whose Business it was to exhort People to the Observance of this Law, and reprove them for their Neglects of it. The Calamities that happen'd to their Nation from time to time, and which they look'd upon as Punishments for their Violation of that Law, increased their Veneration for it. And the Law itself laid a solemn Injunction upon them, neither to add to it, nor diminish from it, and denounced dreadful Plagues against them that did so; which made them more careful not to change nor corrupt it. Taking all this together, it may be justly affirm'd, that we have a greater Proof of the Preservation, the Purity, and Incorruption of the Law of *Moses*, than of any other Laws or Records in any Nation, which yet we count it unreasonable to doubt of or dispute.

It is a further Confirmation of this, when we consider that the *Samaritans* as well as *Jews* have all along had and still have this Law among them, acknowledging the Sacredness and Obligation of it. It is well known that the *Samaritan* and *Jewish* Code of the *Pentateuch* agree in all the Laws and Facts; that the Differences between them are small
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and inconsiderable, relating only to the Ages of some of the Patriarchs, and a few other Things of little moment; but the Laws, the Precepts, the main important Facts whereby the Law was attested, are the same in both. And whence is it, that both these Sects of People, so different and opposite in other Things, and which had such a Hatred to one another, have all along agreed, and still agree, in receiving and owning the same Law of *Moses*? I shall not now inquire, whether the *Samaritans* derived their Book of the Law from some ancient Copy used among the *Israelites* of the Ten Tribes, into whose Place they succeeded, and whose Religion they adopted for their own, (which seems to me most probable for several Reasons) or whether, as others suppose, their Copy of the Law was taken from *Ezra's* correct Edition of it. If this latter should be granted, yet still if they received it, it must be because they were sensible that it was a true and good Copy of the genuine original Law of *Moses*, the same that had been used and acknowledged by their Predecessors of the Ten Tribes. For if they had not had a sufficient Assurance of this, or if *Ezra* had made any material Alterations in the original Law, or corrupted it with Additions of his own, they would have been so far from receiving it upon the Authority of a Person against whom they had great Prejudice, that they would have been glad to detect and expose the Corruption.

It must be further consider'd, that the extraordinary and miraculous Facts by which those Laws are attested, have been transmitted all along from the Beginning together with those Laws. And indeed any one that reads the Law of *Moses* must be sensible, that it is a perpetual Intermixture of Laws and Facts, which are so connected with one another, and have such a mutual Dependence, that the one
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cannot be separated from the other. The Law every where supposes and refers to the Facts, and is founded upon them; many of the Laws have a particular Relation to those Facts; and there were publick Rites instituted from the Time of giving the Law, which were design'd to keep up a constant publick Commemoration of them in the Nation. And if the Facts were deliver'd by *Moses* from the beginning along with the Body of Laws he gave, then we may be certain those Facts are true, because (as has been already shewn, p. 32.) they were of such a nature, that they could not possibly have been impos'd upon the People, if they had not been true. And indeed it was on the account of those illustrious and extraordinary Attestations, of which all the People were Witnesses, that the Law of *Moses* was at first received, (which had otherwise many Things in it to which they could scarce have been brought to submit) and that the Authority of it was acknowledged afterwards in all Ages among that People. It appears from the Account of their History in all its different Periods, and under all their various Revolutions, under their Judges, Kings, &c. that the Knowledge of those extraordinary Facts, viz. the Deliverance of *Israel* out of *Egypt* by the most astonishing Acts of Power, their passing the Red-Sea, the Promulgation of the Law at *Sinai* with such Circumstances of divine Glory and Grandeur, and the many stupendious Miracles done in the Wilderness for forty Years, was constantly preserv'd amongst the People. There is a perpetual Reference to them, as Things universally known and believ'd. These Things are mention'd on all Occasions in their publick Prayers and Confessions to God, and in their Acknowledgments and Thanksgivings, in the Exhortations of the Prophets, and in the Psalms, many of which contain an Abridgment

ment of the History of *Moses*, and of the wonderful Facts there recorded, particularly the 78th, 105th, 106th Psalms. So that whosoever will pretend that these Facts are forg'd, must suppose that some Impostor, at some Time or other, not only put a new Body of Laws upon the People, and those of a peculiar Nature and Character, and which they would not easily have submitted to, as being contrary to the Laws and Customs of all the neighbouring Nations, and made them believe that these were the old Laws by which their Nation had been all along govern'd, yea and that they themselves knew it to be so, though they had never heard of them before; and that such and such solemn publick Rites had been observ'd amongst them in Commemoration of such and such extraordinary Events, though they had never observ'd those Rites nor heard of those Events before; but that he also put a new Body of History upon them, and made them believe that these were the publick Records of their Nation; that he forg'd all their sacred Books, the Psalms, the Prophecies, and made them receive all these as not only Books that had been all along acknowledged and well known among them, though till that day they were Strangers to 'em, but also as of divine Authority. And he that is capable of making such a wild Supposition as this, cannot be said to give a Reason, but only to shew an obstinate Resolution not to believe.

That this cou'd not possibly be done in the Time of the *Babylonish* Captivity, which yet is the only Time that can be assign'd for it, or by *Ezra*, the most likely Person to be charg'd with such a Forgery, hath been already shewn. Nor indeed can any Time be assign'd when such an Imposition was possible, though we should suppose the Jews to have been ever so stupid and barbarous.
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And yet this is far from being the Case; for (however contemptible a Notion some have form'd of them) they were generally far superior to other Nations in useful Learning and Knowledge; the People in general had incomparably juster Notions of those Things that are most worthy to be known, than the *Greeks* with all their boasted Learning and Politeness; and they had all along among them excellent Persons, who (as appears from their admirable Writings) had just and noble Sentiments of the Deity and of pure Morals, as well as of civil Prudence.

Besides these external Evidences, which taken together do form a Series of convincing Proofs, that the Law of *Moses* is transmitted to us in its genuine Purity, as it was all along received and acknowledged from the Time in which it was given; besides this, I say, we shall find, if we examine the Law it self, all the Marks and Characters of genuine Antiquity. It has every where the Air of an Original, and breathes the unaffected Simplicity of the first Ages. Every thing, even those Things that are most wonderful and surprising, is there related without any studied Ornaments and Decorations, in that fair, plain, and artless Manner, that becomes Truth. It carries every where in it the Characters of Truth and Impartiality. Especially in the Book of *Deuteronomy*, there is such a Pathos, such a Dignity and Force, and yet such a Probity and Simplicity, such a noble Zeal for God, join'd with the most tender and fatherly Concern for the People, as could scarce possibly be counterfeited.

Nor is it an inconsiderable Argument of the genuine Antiquity and Integrity of the Books of *Moses*, that there are many Things related there, (especially concerning the Ancestors of the Jews, for whose Memory they had the greatest Veneration) which it cannot be suppos'd would have been
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inserted, if it had been the Composition of *Ezra*, or any later Jew ; and which on the contrary we may justly suppose they would have altered, if they durst have made any Alterations in those original Records, for which the whole Nation had so profound a Veneration. Of this kind is the Account that is there given of the manner of *Jacob's* obtaining the Blessing from *Esau*, which seem'd to reflect on the Honour of their Ancestor, after whose Name they were call'd ; and might give a Handle to the *Edomites* (between whom and the Jews there was a continual Jealousy) to object that the Blessing was surreptitiously obtain'd. Of this kind also is the Story of *Judah's* scandalous Incest with *Tamar* his Daughter-in-law, and she a *Canaanite* too ; from which incestuous Copulation proceeded the most illustrious Families of the Tribe of *Judah*, out of which they expected the Messiah to descend ; the execrable Cruelty and Perfidy of *Simeon* and *Levi*, (the latter *Moses's* own Ancestor, from whom proceeded all the Priests) and the solemn Curse pronounc'd upon them for it ; the Account of the *Israelites* worshipping the golden Calf, so soon after their having received the Law at *Horeb*, than which nothing could possibly be more to the discredit of that People ; and the mean and scandalous Part *Aaron* the first High-Priest, and from whom the whole Order of Priests descended, is represented to have acted on that Occasion. These, and other Things that might be mention'd, the later Jews, and particularly the Priests, would never have invented, nor endur'd, if they had not been perswaded, that thus it was in the original sacred Records, which they durst not presume to corrupt or change. Nor can it be supposed that any Jew would have forg'd the Accounts of the frequent unreasonable Rebellions of the People, their Hardness of Heart and Unbelief, their re-

peated Murmurings and Ingratitude to God and his Servant *Moses*, at the same time that such glorious Things were done for them, their base Conduct and Cowardice in the Affair of the Spies, and Resolution of returning to their Bondage in *Egypt* again. These Things are no where palliated or disguised in the Books of *Moses*, but represented plainly and impartially, and yet not with a Spirit of Malice and Bitterness and a Design to expose them, but with such a Probity and Simplicity, such a Mixture of tender Concern for the People, as well as Zeal for the Honour of God, as furnishes a signal Proof both of the Impartiality and Candor of *Moses* the first Writer, and of the great Antiquity, Purity and Integrity of those sacred Records. Nor can there be a greater Proof of the Regard the Jews had to their Authority, than that though they have been always very remarkable for their Zeal for the Honour of their Nation, they have not altered or softened any of those Passages, that tended so highly to the dishonour of their Ancestors, as a stupid, ungrateful and stubborn Generation, and which have been turn'd to their Reproach ever since.

It deserves further to be remark'd concerning the Mosaic Writings, that there is nothing in them that favours of a later Age; nothing of the Temple at *Jerusalem*, or Mount *Zion*, of which the later Writings of the Jews are so full; not so much as a Prophecy relating to it, which probably would have been inserted, if this Law had been invented or interpolated by any Jews that lived after the building of the Temple, and settling the divine Worship at *Jerusalem*; especially, considering how useful it would have been in their Controversy with the *Israelites* of the ten Tribes and the *Samaritans*, to have had some Passages tending this way, inserted in that original Law, for which
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the whole Nation had the highest Veneration. And the profound Silence that is in the Law of *Moses*, concerning these and some other things of which the later *Jews* were very fond, is a great Proof of the Antiquity and Purity of those Writings.

Upon the whole, if the *Jews* had alter'd or interpolated those original Laws and Records, it is to be supposed they would have done it in their own favour; but on the contrary, when it appears that those parts of them are untouch'd, which we might suppose they would have most wish'd to be alter'd, and that those things are not inserted, which we might suppose they would have been most fond of inserting, this furnishes the strongest Proof of the Integrity of the whole. And though the later *Jews* observ'd many Ceremonies, besides those prescrib'd in the Law of *Moses*, and invented many ways of performing their Rites, &c. which they pretended to have received by oral Tradition from the Beginning; yet they never presum'd to insert any of these into the written Law, or to add to or alter the Text itself in favour of them; tho' they endeavour'd to accommodate it to them as well as they could, and to find a Foundation for them there. A manifest Proof how very careful and scrupulous they were in this matter!

I know there are some Passages produced as Proofs of Interpolations in the Law of *Moses*; but these do not alter any one of the Laws there given, or any one of the Facts there recorded. They are only some small Clauses supposed to be inserted in later times, for a clearer Explication of some Passages in those original Records. The learned and excellent Dr. *Prideaux*, after others, mentions a few Passages of this kind, which he supposes to have been added by *Ezra* on the Review of the Law, see *Connect. Part I. Book V. p. 348*. Indeed I can see no necessity for admitting even these slight Interpolations.

terpolations. I think I could easily shew that there is not one of the Instances mention'd by the Doctor, but what may be supposed to have been written by *Moses* himself, and that some of them cannot without great Absurdity be supposed to have been added by *Ezra* or any other. But this would lead me too far; the Reader may find those Instances consider'd and accounted for, and a solid Answer return'd by Bp. *Kidder*, in his preliminary Discourse to his Notes on the *Pentateuch*. But after all, if we should grant it, it would only shew that there were a very few short Clauses added here and there by a later hand, by way of Illustration. And this proves nothing against the Antiquity or Integrity of those sacred Writings; since these Instances relate to a very few Passages, and don't advance any new Law or Fact.

I have been larger in the Vindication of the Authority, the Purity, and Incorruption of the *Mosaic* Writings; because if this be once establish'd, the Divine Authority of the Old Testament stands good: And therefore I shall not need to add much, with regard to the other Books of the Old Testament.

I don't find our Author advances any particular Objections against them. He contents himself with saying in general, that *there's scarce a Chapter in the Old Testament which gives any historical Account of Matters, but there are some Things in it which could not be there originally*, p. 267*. and he cites Dr. *Prideaux* in the Margin, who says no such thing. It is true, that speaking of the Books of *Chronicles*, *Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, and *Esther*, he saith, *they fall far short of the Correctness which is in the other Part of the Hebrew Scriptures*, Part I. Book V. p. 333. which he attributes to their not having been publish'd and revised by *Ezra*, as being taken
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* P. 240.

into the Canon after his Time. But this is of small Importance. The Difficulties in the Book of *Chronicles* relate chiefly to numeral Letters, some Points of Chronology, and the Names of some Persons in the Genealogies, of most of which the Learned have given a fair Account. Though if we should suppose some Faults and Mistakes in the Transcribers, this is of small consequence.

As to what the Author further urges, that *the Jewish History being for the most part taken from larger Accounts, 'tis no wonder its Abstracts are not always exact*; I would only observe, that their being Abridgments is no prejudice at all to the Authority of the sacred historical Writings. The wonderful Actings of Divine Providence towards their Nation, the Character of their Kings, and their principal Actions, are there related with a remarkable Clearness and Brevity, and with an Impartiality scarce to be equall'd. And the Design of them, is not merely to gratify a Curiosity, but to inspire the People with a Veneration for the Deity, a Detestation of Vice and Idolatry, a Dread of his Justice, and an Admiration of his Goodness; by letting them know how they and their Kings prospered, when they adher'd to the pure Worship of God, and the Practice of Righteousness; and on the contrary, what Calamities befel them, when they fell into Idolatry, and Vice, and Wickedness. These are the noble Lessons which the sacred historical Writings were design'd to convey to Posterity; and the shorter they were in consistency with this Design, the more useful and instructive they would be. And hence it was, that prophetic Men form'd Abridgements of their History with these excellent Views, which were inserted in the sacred Canon for the Use of all the People, to set before them in a summary comprehensive View the History of their Nation, whereas

the larger Accounts would have been too voluminous.

Indeed any one that will impartially examine the historical Writings of the Old Testament, will be convinced that there is a Simplicity, a Love of Truth, a Veneration for the Deity, and a Strain of Piety to be found there, which is scarce to be match'd in other Histories. The Faults of their greatest and most favourite Kings, such as *David* and *Solomon*, are related not with a satyrical Malice and Bitterness, but with a Fairness, an Impartiality, and Candor, that deserve to be admired. There is no room for supposing that the later *Jews* forged these Writings for the Glory of their Nation, since the same Writings that relate the great Things God did for them, do also represent them as a most unworthy and ungrateful People, and are every where full of Complaints of their Conduct. Their repeated Revolts from God, and the Punishments inflicted on them for their Disobedience, are represented in a plain and candid manner, so as to justify the Charge that *Stephen* advances against them, and with which they were so much provoked, *Acts* 7. 51. *Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in Heart and Ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your Fathers did, so do ye.* And if the *Jews* had afterwards alter'd or corrupted those sacred Records, we may justly suppose, they would have taken care to preserve those Passages that might be for their Honour, and to have struck out or soften'd those that bore hard upon their Nation, and upon the Memory of their most admir'd Princes and Heroes, for whom they had the greatest Regard.

The same Characters of Truth are observable in those Psalms, which contain an Abridgment of the History of their Nation; where we have an Account as of the wonderful Things God had done for them, so of the ungrateful Returns they made.

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There we find the humblest Confessions of their great Guilt, their Perfidiousness, and Hardness of Heart, and these Acknowledgments mixt with a remarkable Strain of unaffected Piety and Devotion. See particularly the 78th, 105th, 106th Psalms.

The Prophetical Writings have many remarkable Characters of genuine Truth and Purity. The Prophets appear to have been true Lovers of their Country, and yet impartial Censurers of the Vices of their Countrymen; reprovng with a noble Freedom the Faults of the People, Priests, and Princes, and warning them in the most affecting and pathetic manner, of their Guilt and of their Danger. There is nothing in their whole Conduct or Character, that breathes the Spirit of this World, or favours of Ambition, Artifice, or Imposture. They did not seek to please and flatter the great, to procure the Applause of the People, or the Favour of the Prince; but a noble Zeal for God, and for pure undefiled Religion, a disinterested Love of Virtue, and a Detestation of Vice every where appears; which frequently exposed them to the Repentment of the great Men, and to the Rage of the Populace. In a word, the prophetical Writings are almost throughout, pathetic Complaints of the universal Degeneracy of Kings and People, and especially of the Corruptions of the Priests, (and therefore not likely to be a Forgery of theirs) which are represented in the most lively Colours, in such a manner, as to convey the most disadvantageous Notion of them to succeeding Ages. It is further to be consider'd, that many of the Predictions contain'd in the prophetical Writings, are of such a nature, that it cannot be conceived they should ever have been forged afterwards; as particularly, those Prophecies of the Messiah, that represent him as a spiritual Saviour, and speak of the Sufferings he was to endure; or that relate to

the Rejection of the *Jews*, and the Calling of the *Gentiles*, and to their being taken into the Church; that *Priests* should be *taken* from among the *Gentiles*, and that *in every place Incense should be offer'd unto the Name of God*, and *a pure Offering*; which supposes that the Law of *Moses* should be abrogated, and a new Dispensation introduced: Things so contrary to the Expectations, and to the rooted Prejudices of the later *Jews*, that they would never have forged them. And if they durst have presum'd to corrupt or interpolate those sacred Writings, it may be justly concluded, that such as these would have been the Passages they would particularly have alter'd.

I shall not add any thing more, for vindicating the Genuineness and Authority of the Books of the Old Testament. It appears upon this View, that we have all the Evidences that can reasonably be desir'd, that as they were at first written by Men extraordinarily sent and inspir'd of God, so they are transmitted to us in such a degree of Purity and Integrity, as may be safely depended on, without any material Corruption either as to the Laws or Facts.





C H A P. V.

The Authority and Integrity of the sacred Records of the New Testament asserted and vindicated against the Author's Exceptions; that we have all the external Proofs of their being safely transmitted to us, that can be reasonably desired; and that they carry in them the greatest internal Evidences of genuine Truth and Uncorruptedness, that can be found in any Writings whatsoever.

IF we have all the Proofs that can be reasonably desir'd, and sufficient to satisfy every impartial Inquirer, of the genuine Antiquity, the Authority and Integrity of the sacred Writings of the Old Testament, and that they are transmitted to us in such a degree of Purity as may justly be depended on; the Proofs may be said to be still stronger and more convincing with respect to those of the New. We can trace them by manifest Proofs from our own Time up to the very apostolick Age, the Age in which they were written. They have been all along cited in an infinite number of Books, by Writers of different Nations and Parties, by Friends and Enemies. Nor have a few Passages only here and there been quoted, but numberless Passages; they have been from time to time commented upon by a vast Number of Authors, who have in their Writings preserved large Portions of them. It is a thing that cannot be contested, that no Books in the World have been so often appeal'd to on so many different occasions; that there are no Books of which there have been and are so many Copies; that

that no Books have been translated into so many Languages, or spread among so many different Nations, or by which Controversies have been so often decided; so that it may be justly affirm'd, that there are no Books in the world which admit of so clear and full a Proof, or which are derived to us by so credible and constant and general a Tradition as these.

The Pains which the Enemies of Christianity took to destroy those sacred Volumes, especially in *Dioclesian's* Persecution, at the Beginning of the 4th Century, when they did all they could to oblige the Christians to give them up to the Flames, which many of them chose rather to die than to do, proves that it was then well known to the Heathens themselves, that these were look'd upon as the sacred original Records of the Christian Religion, and at the same time shews the vast Veneration which the Christians universally had for them.

Celsus, a most bitter Enemy of Christianity, who lived in the second Century, produces many Passages out of the Gospels *. He represents *Jesus* as the Author of the Christian Doctrine, and as having lived a *very few Years ago*, πρὸ πάντων ὀλίγων ἔτην. He mentions his being born of a Virgin, the Angel's appearing to *Joseph* on occasion of *Mary's* being with child, the Star that appear'd at his Birth, the Wisemen that came to worship him when an Infant, and *Herod's* massacring the Children; *Joseph's* fleeing with the Child *Jesus* into *Egypt* by the Admonition of an Angel; the Holy Ghost's descending on *Jesus* like a Dove when he was baptized of *John*, and the Voice from Heaven declaring him to be the Son of God; his going about with his Disciples; his healing the Sick and Lame, and

* See the Passages in *Origen contra Celsum*, Lib. 1. p. 21, 22, 31, 45, 47, 51. Lib. 2. p. 62, 69, 75, 77, 81, 82, 87, 94, 96, 104, 107. Lib. 5. p. 268, 269, 270.

and raising the Dead ; his foretelling his own Sufferings and Resurrection ; his being betrayed and forsaken by his own Disciples ; his suffering both of his own accord, and in obedience to his heavenly Father ; his Grief and Trouble, and his praying, *Father, if it be possible let this Cup pass from me* ; the ignominious Treatment he met with, the Robe that was put upon him, the Crown of Thorns, the Reed put into his hand, his drinking Vinegar and Gall, and his being scourg'd and crucified. His being seen after his Resurrection by a fanatical Woman [as he calls her, that is, *Mary Magdalen*] and by his own Companions and Disciples ; his shewing them his Hands that were pierced, the Marks of his Punishment ; he mentions also the Angel's being seen at his Sepulchre, and that some said it was one Angel, and others that it was two ; by which he hints at the seeming Variation in the Accounts given of it by the Evangelists.

'Tis true, he mentions all these Things only with a design to ridicule and expose them ; but they furnish us with an uncontested Proof that the Gospels were then extant ; accordingly he expressly tells the Christians, *These Things we have produc'd out of your own Writings* ; see *Origen contra Celsum*, lib. 2. p. 106. And he all along supposes them to have been written by Christ's own Disciples that liv'd and convers'd with him, though he pretends they feign'd many of these things for the honour of their Master, lib. 2. 69, 70. And when he pretends, that he could tell *many other Things relating to Jesus, truer than those Things that were written of him by his own Disciples, but that he willingly pass'd them by*, ibid. p. 67. we may conclude from his own Expressions, both that he was sensible that these Accounts were written by Christ's own Disciples, (and indeed he never pretends

tends to contest this) and that he was not able to produce any contrary Accounts to invalidate them, as he certainly would have done, if it had been in his power; since no Man ever writ with greater Virulence against Christianity than he. And indeed how was it possible for *ten or eleven Publicans and Boatmen* (as he calls Christ's Disciples by way of Contempt, p. 47.) to have impos'd such Things upon the World if they had not been true, so as to persuade such vast Multitudes to embrace a new and despis'd Religion, contrary to all their Prejudices and Interests, and to believe in one that had been crucified?

There are several other things that shew that *Celsus* was acquainted with the Gospels. He produces several of our Saviour's Sayings there recorded; as that *it is easier for a Camel to pass through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God*; that *to him that smites us on one Cheek, we must turn the other*; that *it is not possible to serve two Masters*; his Precepts against *Thoughtfulness for the morrow*, by a Comparison drawn from the *Crows and Lilies*; his foretelling that *false Prophets should arise, and work Wonders*; his saying, *Wo unto you, &c.* He mentions also some Passages of the Apostle *Paul*, such as these, *The World is crucified unto me; and I unto the World*; the *Wisdom of Men is Foolishness with God*; an *Idol is nothing*.

The Use I would make of all this is, that it appears here with an uncontested Evidence by the Testimony of one of the most malicious and virulent Adversaries the Christian Religion ever had; and who was also a Man of considerable Parts and Learning; that the Writings of the Evangelists were extant in his Time (which was in the next Century to that in which the Apostles liv'd) and that these Accounts were written by Christ's

own Disciples, and consequently that they were written in the very Age in which the Facts there related were done, and when therefore it would have been the easiest thing in the World to have convinc'd them of Falshood, if they had not been true.

The Testimony of *Justin Martyr* is also very remarkable. He had been a Heathen Philosopher, and very well vers'd in their Learning, as appears by his Writings, and was converted (as many other learned Men were) to Christianity. In his second Apology (as it is call'd, for it was really the first) dedicated to the Emperors *Adrian* and *Antoninus Pius*, which at the furthest was written in the middle of the second Century, within a little more than a hundred Years after the Death of our Saviour, giving an Account of the Christians in his Time, he lets us know that the Records or Monuments [*ἀπομνημονεύματα*] of the Apostles, as well as the Writings of the Prophets, were read in the Christian Assemblies every Lord's Day. This then was the general known Practice of the Christians throughout the World in his Time; [and he elsewhere assures us they were then dispers'd through all Nations.] Which shews not only that those Writings were then extant, but that they had been so for a considerable Time, and were spread through all the Churches, and receiv'd as written by the Apostles of our Lord. And indeed if they had not been written in the Apostolical Age, it cannot be conceiv'd that they could have been so soon after generally dispers'd, and statedly read in the publick Assemblies of the Christians, as of equal Authority with the Writings of the ancient Prophets, which had been read in the Synagogues for some Ages on the Sabbath-days. Accordingly *Justin Martyr* himself, every where in his Works, quotes great numbers of Passages out of almost all the Writings

Writings of the New Testament, and particularly out of the four Gospels, as of divine Authority.

Polycarp flourish'd before him, who had seen and convers'd with *St. John*; and we have an Epistle of his still extant, which tho' short, is full of Testimonies drawn from the sacred Writings of the New Testament, both Gospels and Epistles. *Ignatius* flourish'd at the latter end of the first Century, and suffer'd Martyrdom at the beginning of the second; and in his Epistles there are also several Citations out of the New Testament Writings. And that which is the most venerable Monument of Antiquity, the Epistle of *Clemens Romanus*, which all acknowledge to be genuine, and who lived in the very Apostolical Age, recites some Passages out of the Gospels, and the Epistles of *St. Paul*, which he quotes as of divine Authority. And this brings us to the very Age in which the Apostles writ. So that we still find those sacred Writings extant, approved and acknowledged as of divine Authority from the beginning of Christianity.

It is to no purpose to talk of the Weakness or of the pious Frauds of the Fathers, which this Author with so much pleasure enlarges upon. Most of those Fathers of the first and second Century were originally Heathens and Jews, and turn'd Christians upon the Evidence of the Facts recorded in the Writings of the New Testament. Let us suppose them to have been ever so weak, capable of being impos'd on themselves, or of a Design to impose upon others; yet 'tis certain they were not the Forgers of those Writings. They did not set up for the Authors of a new Religion, but turn'd to one already in Being, and govern'd themselves by Writings that were then extant, which they received as divine. And whether they were mistaken or not in taking those Writings

tings to be by divine Inspiration, yet certainly they could tell whether those Writings were then generally reputed and received by Christians as divine, and as written by the Apostles of Jesus. Of this they are competent Witnesses, and this is all that we produce them for.

The spurious Gospels and other Writings publish'd in the name of the Apostles in the first and second Century, which some produce to invalidate the Authority of the sacred Canon, seem to me, if rightly considered, to be a Confirmation of it. The rejecting those spurious Writings, shews that the primitive Christians were not so easily imposed on, and were more careful and exact than this Author would have it believ'd; and that they were not for receiving any Accounts of the Actions of Christ and his Apostles (though seemingly for his Honour, as some of the Stories in those spurious Gospels appear'd to be) without a sufficient Evidence that they were genuine. It could scarce be avoided, supposing such a Person as Jesus to have appear'd, and to have wrought such astonishing Miracles, and that his Apostles went through all the World, preaching and performing the most wonderful Works in his Name; I say, it could scarce be avoided, but that many would publish Accounts of these Things, which were of so extraordinary a nature, and which had given rise to a new Religion, that made so swift and surprizing a Progress. Instead therefore of being surpriz'd, that many Books were written in the very Age of the Apostles, relating to those wonderful Events, we might rather wonder if it had not been so. Some of 'em, it's probable, were written with a good Design, but not with sufficient Care; the Authors of 'em might take up with light and uncertain Reports, and were not careful enough to publish no Accounts but what were well
attested

attested and confirm'd. Some such were extant when St. *Luke* published his Gospel, as appears from his Preface to it; where he speaks of many that *had taken in hand to set forth in order a Declaration of those Things which are most surely believed among us, &c.* But he intimates that they were not written with sufficient exactness; and therefore he proposes to write an Account of those Things himself, *having had perfect Understanding of all Things from the very first.* He took care to write nothing but what he had full Assurance of; *that thou mightest know*, says he to Theophilus, *the Certainty of those Things wherein thou hast been instructed.* I add, that as there were then false Apostles, whom the Apostle *Paul* often complains of, who were for mixing Judaism with Christianity, and under a false shew of Wisdom and Philosophy, were for corrupting the Purity of the Gospel with foreign Mixtures; so it is not improbable that some of these might pretend to write Accounts of our Saviour and his Apostles, that they might the better intermix their own peculiar Notions and Principles. There is nothing in all this but what might naturally be expected. Though as there were many then alive that could contradict those Accounts, so they were never generally received, nor their Authority acknowledged in the Christian Church.

I see no reason therefore for the Triumphs that the Enemies of Christianity have raised on the account of the spurious Gospels, and other forg'd Writings in the first Ages of the Church. It does not follow, that because there were such Writings, whose Authority was not acknowledged, that therefore the genuine ones, which were universally received and acknowledged from the beginning, were of no Authority. It may be rather said, that even the spurious Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, as they gave Testimony in general

to the wonderful Miracles of our Saviour and his Apostles, so they also serve to shew the Care of the first Christians, who would not receive any of these Things without sufficient Evidence; no, not though they seemingly tended to the Honour of Christianity. A remarkable Instance of which, *Tertullian* acquaints us with; that a certain Presbyter of *Asia* forg'd some Acts in the Name of *Paul*, which he did out of love to *Paul*, as he himself alledged afterwards when convicted of it, and therefore we may be sure contrived it so that it might be to his Honour; yet this did not make it pass in the Christian Church; the Forgery was immediately detected, and the Forger condemn'd for it, *Tertul. de Baptismo, Cap. 17.* And indeed the spurious Gospels that were abroad had this good Effect, that it put the Churches upon taking all proper Precautions, and made them more careful and exact to admit none but those of whose Genuineness and Authority they had undoubted Evidence. These were immediately received, even in the very Times of the Apostles; and in the Age immediately succeeding, we find them generally dispers'd throughout the Christian World, and their Authority universally acknowledged; whereas no Instance can be brought of any of those spurious Gospels, or Books falsely ascrib'd to the Apostles, that were generally received and owned by the Christian Church, in the Ages nearest the Apostles, as canonical Scripture.

What has been alledged by some, that the first and eldest Christian Writers quoted those false Gospels and supposititious Writings ascribed to the Apostles, promiscuously with the canonical Scriptures, and as of equal Authority, is a very great Mistake. The first Writers that lived nearest to the Apostolical Age, *Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp*, never quote any of them at all; *Justin*

Martyr the next ancient Writer, though he some hundreds of times draws Testimonies out of the genuine Gospels and Epistles, yet never so much as once in all his Works mentions any of those spurious Gospels, much less quotes them as of divine Authority. *Irenæus*, who flourished in the latter Part of the second Century, mentions some of them, but it is only to reject them, and he lets us know, that the Churches throughout the World did so too, at the same time that he informs us that they universally received and acknowledged the four Gospels. And tho' some have made themselves very merry with his Descants on the number four, and the Mysteries he finds in it, yet this is plain from his Testimony, that four Gospels were then universally received and acknowledged by the Christian Church, and no more, as of divine Authority.

Clemens Alexandrinus and *Origen* are produc'd, as frequently citing those Apocryphal Writings; but it appears from many express Passages in both their Writings, that they received only the four Gospels as of divine Authority, and acknowledged to be so by the universal Church. See *Clem. Alex. Strom. Lib. 3. Origen in Matt. Lib. 1. apud Euseb. Hist. Eccles. Lib. 6. Cap. 25. Homil. in Luc. 1. 1. Philocal. Cap. 5. P. 29.* Indeed most of the Books with which Mr. *Toland* makes so mighty a Flourish, in the Catalogue he gives us of them in his *Amyntor*, are Books of which we hear nothing till the third Century, and many of them not mentioned by any Ecclesiastical Writer till the fourth; when one *Lucius Charinus* forg'd many of them; and to swell the Number, the same Book is often produc'd under different Names; nor was any one of them ever generally received in the Christian Church. He that would see all this fully proved, may consult *Jones's History of the*

Canon of the New Testament, especially *Vol. I. Part II.*

It will not be denied, that the primitive Christians were in some things too credulous. Many of them took the *Sibylline* Oracles to be a genuine Work. This was a Matter in which they might be imposed on. It was generally believed both amongst Heathens and Christians, that there had been Prophetesses among the Heathens call'd *Sibyls*; and they might honestly suppose, that God might make use of them to foretel the Kingdom of Christ. There had been many Verses and Prophecies of various kinds carried about in the Name of the *Sibyls* even in *Cicero's* Time; and when somebody took occasion to forge Verses in their Name in favour of Christianity, others might be apt greedily and without due Examination to receive their Testimony, and make use of it in their Disputes with the Heathens. But these Writings were never received as canonical and of divine Authority in the Christian Church, as those of the Old Testament Prophets were. And indeed, however weak or easily imposed on the primitive Christians might be in other things, yet 'tis manifest that they were very cautious not to receive any Gospels or Writings as of divine Authority, and the Rule of their own Faith and Religion, but what came to them sufficiently attested and confirm'd. This appears from the Number of spurious Writings they rejected. And their backwardness to receive some particular Books into the sacred Canon (which were not so soon and so generally known as the rest) shews that they were not very hasty in receiving Books as canonical, or as writ by the Apostles, without full Evidence that they were so. Nor can any Reason be alledged why the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of *Paul*, and the first Epistles of *Peter* and *John*, were from the

Beginning universally received, and never doubted of in the Church, but that immediately in the first Age they were both generally dispersed through the Christian World, and were certainly and universally known to be genuine, and of divine Authority.

It appears then, that with reference to the sacred Writings of the New Testament, we have the strongest external Evidence that can be produced for any Books whatsoever. We can trace them up from our own Time through every Age, by a Series of Proofs and Evidences which can scarce be alledged for any other Writings, and find them still in being, the Church still in possession of them, to the very Age in which they were written; acknowledged and received by those who had best Opportunities to know, and who shew'd by their rejecting many Writings that had not sufficient Authority, how careful they were not to be imposed on in this Matter.

It greatly strengthens this Evidence, and puts it beyond all reasonable Doubt, when we consider that never were there any Writings in the World that carried greater internal Marks of Genuineness and uncorrupted Purity, than those of the New Testament. As to the Narrations of Facts, they are told with a marvellous Simplicity. The sacred Writers content themselves with relating the Facts as they happen'd, without Reflections, without Amplifications, without any Arts to possess the Reader, but with that Plainness, and yet with that Assurance that becomes Truth. They appear all along to be perfectly acquainted with the Matters of which they write; they mention many occasional Facts, and all of them entirely agreeable to the Times they write of, as many have shewn, particularly Mr. *Lardner* in his learned Treatise of *the Credibility of the Gospel-History*. When they relate

relate the Actions and Discourses of our blessed Saviour himself, for whom they had the highest Veneration, they still preserve a chaste Simplicity, they barely recount these Things without any extravagant Praises and Encomiums; and when they mention the Slanders cast upon him by the *Jews*, and the cruel Treatment he met with, they break out into no severe Invectives or Reproaches against them on that account. These Records were written by the Apostles themselves, or by their most intimate Friends and Followers; yet no pains is taken to extol them, and recommend them to the Admiration of Mankind. Their Faults are not conceal'd. Their Ignorance and Dulness, their Slowness of Apprehension and Backwardness to believe, their obstinate Prejudices, their foolish Ambition, and Contentions who should be greatest, for which they were so sharply rebuk'd by our Saviour, their Cowardice in forsaking their Lord at his last Sufferings, the base Perfidy of the most eminent of them all in denying and forswearing Christ; these Things are related without Palliation or Disguise, and yet not with Malice or bitter Reflections, but with an Air of Simplicity and Impartiality that cannot be sufficiently admir'd. It appears from the whole, that plain simple Truth was what they regarded; the Variations between them in some smaller Matters (which yet admit of a just Reconciliation) as it shews they did not write in concert, so it confirms their Agreement in the main; since there is an intire Harmony in all the principal Facts, and in the Doctrines and Discourses too which they record, and which are wise and excellent. If any one will take the Pains to compare the Writings of the Evangelists with *Philostratus's* Life of *Apollonius Tyanæus*, whom some of the Pagans would fain have set up as a Rival to Jesus, he will soon find the Difference there is between an

idle Romance, stuffed with rhetorical Flourishes and vain Ostentations of Learning to mislead and amuse the Reader, and plain, grave, sober History, related without Art or Disguise, and with a pure View to Truth.

It appears not only from the Testimonies of those that lived nearest these Times, and even of the Enemies themselves, as has been already observed, that those Accounts of the Evangelists were written in the apostolical Age, that is, in the very Age in which the Facts there related were done; but the same may be gather'd from many internal Characters in the Writings themselves. Three of the Evangelists, *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, relate our Saviour's Predictions concerning the Destruction of the Jewish Temple and Nation. Was it not natural if they had writ after this great Event (which was within 40 Years after the Death of our Saviour) to take notice how exactly those Predictions were accomplish'd? It is unconceivable that there should be no mention of this at all in any of those Writings, if they had been all written after the Destruction of *Jerusalem* and the Subversion of the Jewish Polity. It is generally believed indeed that *John's* Gospel was written after that Time; but as his Design was chiefly to supply what the other Evangelists had omitted, he takes no notice of these Predictions of our Saviour, which had been sufficiently mention'd before by the other three Evangelists, and therefore had no occasion to mention the Accomplishment of them.

The *Acts of the Apostles* was written, as is evident from several Passages in the Book itself, by one that was with *Paul* in his Travels and in his Voyage to *Rome*; it ends with *Paul's* first Imprisonment at *Rome*, and was probably writ before his Inlargement, of which it gives no account, or of any thing that happen'd to him afterwards, and there-

therefore was written in the very apostolical Age ; and yet *Luke's* Gospel was written before the *Acts*, as is evident from the Beginning of this latter Book, which like the former was dedicated to *Theophilus*. And therefore the Gospel of *Luke* was written in a very few Years after the Death of our Saviour, when many were yet alive that had seen and conversed with him ; and who therefore were Witnesses to the Truth of the Facts there related. And it has been the constant Tradition, that the Gospels of *Matthew* and *Mark* were writ before that of *Luke*.

Some have been pleased to find fault, that the Doctrines of Christianity are not delivered in the New Testament in a systematical way. But it is much more wisely order'd. There might in that Case have been more ground to suspect an Imposture. But as most of the doctrinal Writings of the New Testament are Epistles written occasionally to particular Churches, and with a particular Reference to the Circumstances of that time, yet so as that the Instructions there given are of general use to the Church in all Ages ; this affords many peculiar Marks and Characters of Genuineness scarce to be counterfeited, and which plainly point to the Time in which they were written. This is especially remarkable in *Paul's* Epistles. For not to mention that glorious Ardour and Freedom of Spirit, that Love to God and Jesus Christ, and that Zeal for the Divine Glory, that tender Concern and Affection for the Salvation of those to whom he writes, which every where appears ; to which may be added, that he all along speaks in the most diminishing Terms of himself, and even when obliged in his own Vindication to mention his Labours and Attainments, does it with an unparallel'd Modesty : not to mention these and other internal genuine Characters that are every where

observable in his Epistles, there are many things in them that have a special Reference to some particular Occasions, and the peculiar Circumstances of the Persons and Churches to whom he wrote. They and the other Writings of the New Testament plainly relate to the Church as in its Infancy, and to the Questions and Controversies which then troubled it.

There is something in almost every one of *Paul's* Epistles that relates to the Judaizing Teachers, who were for urging the Obligation of the Mosai-cal Law and Ceremonies, which was more particularly the Controversy of that Time, and which troubled the Church in its earliest State, but was not so much agitated afterwards. Nothing could be more for his Purpose in this Controversy, than to take notice of the Destruction of the Jewish Temple and Polity, if he had lived or written after that Time; and there being not the least mention of this in his Epistles, or in those written by *Peter*, *James*, and *John*, though there are several Things that might give them occasion to do so, is a great Presumption that they were written before that remarkable Event. And here by the way I would observe, that in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, where the Subject led directly to it, all the Arguings suppose the Temple then in being, and its sacred Rites and Ceremonies still in use among the *Jews*. An evident Proof that that Epistle was written before the Destruction of the Temple; since the Author of it would never have omitted this, which would have very much strengthen'd his Argument that that Priesthood and Polity was now abolish'd. In the Epistle ascrib'd to *Barnabas*, the Destruction of the Temple is expressly mention'd, *Chap. 16.* where speaking of the Temple he saith, *It is now destroy'd by their Enemies*; then citing a Prophecy to shew that the City, Temple, and People of *Israel* were

were to be given up, he adds, *And it has come to pass according as the Lord spake.* An evident Proof that this Epistle was written after the Destruction of *Jerusalem*. And if *Paul's* Epistles had been written after that Event, we might have expected some Hints of this kind ; but no such thing appears.

There is one general Mark of genuine uncorrupted Antiquity that runs through all the Writings of the New Testament, that every thing there breathes the Simplicity of the first Age of the Christian Church. There were several Corruptions that began early to be introduced ; and a great variety of Rites and Ceremonies that were brought into the Christian Worship, as appears from the Writings in the second and beginning of the third Century : but concerning all these there is a profound Silence in the New Testament. There are no Marks of Innovation there, but every thing appears in its primitive Simplicity both as to Doctrine and Worship, without any of the Additions of succeeding Ages. And any one that compares the genuine Writings of the New Testament with the *Apostolical Constitutions*, will soon perceive the remarkable Difference there is between them in this respect.

Our Author indeed has many Hints about the Corruption of the New Testament Writings. He observes, that they have passed through the Hands of Men, who, if *we may judge by the great Number of forged Passages and forged Books, would scruple no pious Frauds*. This he seems to lay a great Stress upon, for he often repeats it. He has a great deal, p. 161*, &c. about the Corruptions, the Frauds and Forgeries of the primitive Times †; a Subject

* P. 138, &c.

† What he offers to prove his Charge of Corruption against the Fathers, is very well answered in the *Remarks on a late Book, intitled, Christianity as old, &c. with regard to Ecclesiastical Antiquity*, by Mr. Chapman.

Subject which he and the Gentlemen of his way inlarge upon with pleasure; and he insinuates, that therefore it is impossible for us to have any Certainty that the Scriptures are transmitted to us pure and uncorrupted.

These are only general Harangues that prove nothing. Let us suppose that many of the Fathers were as weak or as fraudulent as he would have ^{them} thought to be, capable of being imposed on themselves, or of a Design to impose on others; it may still be proved with as clear an Evidence as any thing of this Nature is capable of, that they did not corrupt the sacred Writings, nor was it in their power to do so.

It has been already shewn, that the Scriptures of the New Testament were in Being from the very Apostolical Age; and were received by the Christians in general as of divine Authority. And considering the remarkable Zeal of the primitive Christians for their Religion, and that they constantly met from the beginning every Lord's Day, and then had the Scriptures of the Apostles as well as Prophets read to them in their Churches or Assemblies; and considering that these Christian Churches were soon spread all over the *Roman Empire* in great Numbers, so that the younger *Pliny* complains, that in his Time, which was in seventy Years after the Death of our Saviour, the Heathen Temples were almost forsaken; considering all this, we may be sure that those sacred Writings which the Christians then look'd upon with the highest Veneration as the Rule of their Faith, were soon generally dispers'd and spread into distant Countries; they were soon translated into several Languages; particularly the *Syriack* Version still extant was probably made in the very Apostolick Age; see *Jones on the Canon of the New Testament*, Vol. I. Part II. Chap. 15, 16, &c. and on all

all these accounts a general Corruption of them in those early Ages of the Church was an impossible Thing: And any Attempt of that kind must have been immediately detected. And if it appears from the Testimony of several of the ancient Writers in the second Century, that some Hereticks attempted to forge Writings in the Name of the Apostles, or to interpolate and corrupt the true ones, it also appears that they could never make these Forgeries pass upon the Body of the Christian Church, which immediately and unanimously rejected them.

There were many Controversies that early arose in the Church; as about the time of keeping *Easter*, which was warmly debated about the end of the second Century; that about re-baptizing of Hereticks, which was agitated in the third, &c. both Parties pleaded Apostolical Tradition; and the Zeal they express'd, plainly shews they would have been very glad to have had an express Testimony of Scripture on their side. But do we find any Passage inserted in the sacred Writings in favour of either of the Parties? There is a profound Silence there on these Heads, an evident Proof that neither Party endeavour'd to corrupt the Scriptures in their own favour; nor indeed was it possible for either of them to do so, without being immediately detected and exposed. In the Controversies between the *Arians* and their Adversaries, and afterwards in the *Nestorian* and *Eutychian* Controversies, the Texts produced on both sides from Scripture were the same that are still to be found there. Neither Party had it in their power, if they had it in their Inclination, to corrupt the Scriptures in their own favour, and it is evident in fact that they have not done it.

Never was any Controversy debated with greater Warmth than that about Image-Worship. The
second

second Council of *Nice*, according to the Request of Pope *Adrian's* Legate, ordered *the Writings to be suppress'd that were against the venerable Images*. And it might be suspected, that since the *Eastern* and *Western* Churches, or at least those among them that had the Power in their hands, agreed in this Point*, and were very desirous to make the Scriptures speak for them, (as appears from the miserable Attempts they made this way) they might, as it was their Interest, endeavour to insert some Passages in the sacred Writings to this purpose. But it is evident in fact this was not done, there being nothing in the Scriptures now, no more than there was before, to give countenance to Image-Worship, but a great deal to the contrary. Nor indeed if the leading Men among the Clergy in the *East* and *West* had agreed in this, would it have been in their power to have corrupted all the Copies, great Numbers of which were spread over the World in private Hands, and translated into several Languages.

This Author might have given us a much more plausible Harangue than that which he has made about the Corruptions in the primitive Times, if he had undertaken to shew, that the Scriptures were corrupted in the times of Popery. He might have observed, that the Copies of the sacred Writings in the *West* were almost wholly in the hands of the Priests and Monks, and that for many Ages together; That a profound Darkness and Ignorance covered the whole Church; That the Laity were kept

* I would not be understood by this to insinuate, as if Image-Worship was generally received immediately from the time of the second Council of *Nice*, both in the *Eastern* and *Western* Churches. In the *Eastern* Churches, there was a considerable Opposition made to it for many Years even after that Council. And it was a long time before it generally obtain'd in the *Western* Churches, where it prevail'd at last chiefly by the Authority and Influence of the Popes, who were unwearied in their Endeavours to get it established.

kept almost intirely Strangers to the Scriptures, and were for the most part ready to receive whatever the Clergy thought proper to impose upon them; That they were Men, that if we may judge by their Conduct in other things, stuck at nothing to abet and countenance their Corruptions and Superstitions, and to give a divine Sanction to their Usurpations; That they were guilty of numberless Forgeries and Interpolations of Fathers, Councils, Decretal Epistles, &c. And it was evidently much more their Interest to have the Scriptures in their favour than any other Writings whatsoever. What would they not give for a plain Text in favour of the Authority of the Papal See, or to shew that St. *Peter* was Bishop of *Rome*, and all his Successors in that See appointed to be the Vicars of Christ upon Earth, to whom all Men are obliged to submit, and by whom all Controversies are to be decided? The mighty Stir they have made about such sorry Proofs as *Thou art Peter*, &c. and *Feed my Sheep*, &c. shews how very desirous they are to prove their Authority from Scripture. The same may be said with respect to their darling Doctrines of Purgatory, the Invocation of Saints, Worship of Images, &c. The poor Attempts they have made and still make to prove these Things from Scripture, shew how glad they would be to have the Scripture on their side; and at the same time the Care they take that the Scriptures should not be read by the Laity, shews that they are conscious that the sacred Writings are against them; and that they are very unwilling the People should know that they are so. The Presumptions therefore that they falsified and corrupted the Scriptures, are infinitely stronger than any thing our Author has advanced with relation to the Forgeries and Corruptions in the primitive Times. And yet notwithstanding all this, it is
evident

evident to Demonstration, that the Scriptures were not corrupted in the Times of Popery; since we find nothing inserted there in favour of their Corruptions, or of any of those peculiar Tenets that make up the Creed of Popery, as distinguished from our common Christianity. On the contrary, nothing can furnish a more effectual Confutation of their Errors and Corruptions than these very Writings; and it was by reading the Scriptures that our Fathers were enabled to reform themselves from the Romish Corruptions, and to cast off their usurped Authority.

It is evident therefore that the Scriptures being transmitted to us through the Hands of fallible and peccable Men, or of those who were capable of pious Frauds, is no Argument at all that therefore they have been actually corrupted. Since though this should be allowed, we have still the highest Proof that the Scriptures are come to us in their primitive Purity and Simplicity, and that the Priests have not actually corrupted them in their own favour; nor indeed was it in their power to do so.

Our Author produces some Testimonies out of Mr. *Daillé's* Treatise of the Use of the Fathers, concerning the Forgeries and pious Frauds in the primitive Times. But that honest and judicious Critick (as our Author justly calls him) in that very Chapter, where he shews that the Writings of the Fathers have been changed and corrupted in many Places thro' Ignorance or pious Frauds, observes that no Argument can be brought from thence for the Corruption of the divine Writings; which have been always preserved in the Church with much greater Care than any other Writings; which all Nations have learned; which have been translated into all Languages; and which all Sects have retained; Orthodox and Hereticks, Catho-
licks

licks and Schismatics, Greeks and Latins, Moscovites and Ethiopians, carefully watching over one another, so that no Alteration of Importance could happen, but the whole World in a manner would cry out against it: whereas the Writings of the Fathers have been for the most part copied and read by a few Persons, in a few Places, &c. whence it came that such Faults were more easily admitted into them, and more difficult to be discover'd. *Dallæus de Usu Patrum, Lib. 1. Cap. 4.*

We have therefore the strongest Proofs for the Purity and Incorruption of the sacred Writings that can be desir'd. It is to no purpose to raise a Clamour about the Frauds and Artifices of the Priests, and to say they corrupted them, because they had it in their Inclination, and it was their Interest to do so, (which our Author so often repeats) when 'tis evident that in fact none of the Corruptions of the later Ages are inserted there; and that the Priests did not corrupt them in those Instances, in which it was most their Interest, and we might suppose most in their Inclination, to corrupt them. And therefore since they did not corrupt them where they had the strongest Temptations to attempt it, we may justly conclude they did not corrupt them at all.

The particular Instances this Writer brings to prove that there have been Corruptions and Alterations, serve only to shew his strong Inclination to prove it, but at the same time that it was not in his power. He mentions some Attempts made on the New Testament by the Orthodox themselves. That some of them had blotted out those Words, *Jesus wept*, for fear the Hereticks should take advantage of it*; and the last twelve Verses of

* Our Author having observed, that *Daillé* gives Instances of Attempts made on the New Testament by the Orthodox themselves,

of *St. Mark* were left out in most *Greek* Copies, according to *St. Jerome*, which *Omission Grotius* imputes to the Transcribers. And *Hilary* testifies, that in many *Greek* and *Latin* Copies there was nothing concerning Christ's bloody Sweat, and the Angel sent to comfort him; see p. 327*. But these very Instances shew, how impossible it was to introduce an universal Corruption of the Copies. Those very Passages are still in our Bibles; and whatever Attempts some might make, (from what Principle I shall not now examine, or whether done carelessly or on purpose) 'tis plain it was not in

selves, adds, " particularly *Epiphanius*, for saying, that in the true " and most correct Copies of *St. Luke*, it was writ that *Jesus Christ* " wept, and that this Passage had been alledg'd by *St. Irenæus*, " but that the Catholicks had blotted out the Words, fearing " that the Hereticks might abuse it:" Our Author here expresses it, as if *Epiphanius* himself had been one of those Orthodox, who, he says, attempted to corrupt the New Testament. Whereas it is manifest from the Passage in *Epiphanius*, even according to his own Account of it, that *Epiphanius* condemns the Omission in the Copies referr'd to. Besides, the passage *Epiphanius* refers to, as omitted in some Copies, is not the Passage mentioned by our Author, that *Jesus wept*. It must be own'd that *Petavius*, and, after him, *Grotius* took it so. But Dr. *Grabe* in his Edition of *Irenæus*, lib. 3. cap. 32. and since that *F. Massuet* lib. 3. cap. 22. have clearly shewn, that in this *Petavius* was mistaken; and that the Passage *Epiphanius* refers to, as omitted in some Copies of *St. Luke*, was that other Passage concerning Christ's bloody Sweat, and the Angel's being sent to strengthen him: which *Hilary* also testifies, in a Passage produced by this Writer, was wanting in many Copies in his Time. So that the Corruptions of this kind charged on the Orthodox, and about which he raises such Clamours, are reducible to this single Text. And this is still wanting in a few MSS. But there is not any one Copy known to the Learned, that has not that other Passage in *Luke*, concerning *Jesus's* weeping over *Jerusalem*. Nor is there in all Antiquity (except in that Passage of *Epiphanius*, which now appears to have been mistaken) the least Intimation of an Omission, or any variety of Copies relating to that Text.

* P. 296, 297.

in their power to corrupt the Copies universally, if they had been ever so desirous to do it.

The mighty Stir he makes about various Readings is as little to the purpose: An Objection that has been so often baffled, that he might be ashamed to repeat it*. I think it sufficient to observe, that this Objection holds equally against all ancient Writings, and against those most, of which there are the most Copies extant; that is, against those most, of whose Genuineness and Integrity we have the greatest Assurance. For it is evident that the number of various Readings must be multiplied in proportion to the number of the Copies, and yet it is the number of Copies that gives us the greatest Assurance of the Purity and Integrity of any Book whatsoever. And the vast variety of Copies of the New Testament, both in the original *Greek*, and translated into several Languages, furnishes the most unanswerable Argument of the Integrity of the sacred Books, and that a general Corruption of them was impossible. And those very Men that now raise such a Clamour about the number of various Readings, the unavoidable Consequence of a number of Copies and Translations, would, if there had been but a few Copies remaining, have made it a much greater Objection, and with more Reason. 'Tis evident to any one that ever cast his Eye on the various Readings of the New Testament, that there is a general Concurrence in the Copies, both with respect to the Facts and Doctrines. If a New Testament were publish'd with all the various Readings, for which there is the least colourable Pretence, it would not destroy any one of the principal Facts by which the Gospel stands confirm'd, nor subvert any of the main Doctrines of the Christian Faith, nor much alter

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* See particularly *Remarks on a Discourse of Free-Thinking*, by Phil. Lips. p. m. 63, & seq.

the state of any one Controversy among Christians. It is wrong to suppose, as this Author often insinuates, that the Controversies among Christians, or the Errors in any Points of reveal'd Religion, are owing to the Mistakes of Transcribers, or to various Readings, or supposed Corruptions of the original Copies. In all the chief Controversies among Christians, the *Arian*, *Popish*, *Socinian*, *Quinquarticular* Controversies, the principal Texts produced on both sides, and on which the main Stress is laid, are such as are acknowledg'd to be genuine. And I am persuaded, that if the original Bible had been still continued, without any various Readings at all, the Effect would have been the same, considering the Corruption, the Ignorance and Prejudices of Mankind, and their different ways of thinking.

Upon the whole, we have a much stronger Evidence to prove, that the sacred Writings have been transmitted to us pure and genuine, without any material Corruption or Alteration, than we have concerning any other Books in the World. And if there be many Records and Writings of former Ages, historical and moral, which no Man scruples to receive as genuine, and which it would be counted a ridiculous Scepticism to doubt of; this may with much more Justice be applied to the sacred Writings, which we can trace up with an uncontested Evidence from our own Time to the first Age of the Christian Church, and a general Corruption of which was infinitely more difficult than of any other Writings whatsoever, and which carry more and greater internal Marks of Purity and Simplicity than any other Books in the World.

From what has been offer'd we may easily judge whether this Gentleman had reason to insinuate, as he frequently does, that we have no other Evidence for the Genuineness or Incorruption of the

sacred Books, and for their being transmitted safe to us, than *the Words of the Priests, who are hired to maintain the Authority of those Writings.* If any Man should take it in his head to affirm, that we have no other Evidence for the Writings of *Virgil, Horace, Homer, Cicero,* than the Words of the School-masters, who are paid for teaching those Books; I don't know whether our Author would think he was in his Senses, but I am pretty sure he would not think he deserved a serious Answer. And yet such a Supposition would be far more reasonable than that of our Author, as the Evidence we have for the Genuineness of the sacred Writings, is incomparably stronger than what can be produced for the other. But this Writer, and those of his way, securely allow themselves to make use of those Methods of arguing, in order to invalidate the Authority of the Scriptures, which they themselves would be the first to expose and ridicule in any other Case.

It appears then upon an impartial Consideration, that we have the highest Proof that can be reasonably desired, and indeed that a thing of this nature can admit of, that the sacred Writings of the New Testament were written by the Disciples of our blessed Saviour in the very Age in which the Facts were done, and contain a true Account of his Religion, and of the wonderful Facts by which it was attested; and that they are transmitted to us for the main pure and uncorrupted. And if they were written in the Age in which the Facts were said to be done, then those Facts are true. Because (as has been already shewn) they were Facts of such a nature, that the Writers themselves who professed to be Witnesses of them, could not be deceived or made to believe they were true if they had not been so; and as they could not be deceived themselves in Things which were confirm'd by the

Testimony of all their Senses, so we have the highest Reason to believe that they had no Design to impose upon others; it may be justly affirm'd, that all things consider'd, there never were more credible Witnesses; since they appear'd to be Persons of great Probity and Simplicity, and could have no worldly Interest to promote by it, and lastly seal'd their Testimony with their Blood. Or if they had form'd a Design to impose upon the World, it would not have been in their power to have done it, as the Case was circumstanced. The Facts they appeal'd to were not Things done in secret, but of a publick nature, done in the View of Multitudes, and which therefore could not have been imposed upon the World if they had not been true; the Falshood of them must have been immediately detected; especially as they were in the midst of numerous and watchful Enemies, who had the Power in their hands.

Indeed the Truth of the principal Facts recorded in the Gospel, especially the Miracles of our Saviour, was so undeniably manifest, that the most obstinate Enemies of Christianity could not deny them. The *Jews* themselves in their *Talmud*, and even in that blasphemous Piece intitled *Toledoth Jesu*, the Design of which is to expose and vilify our Saviour, yet can't deny his Miracles; though they tell us a foolish Story of his stealing the sacred Name out of the Temple, and sewing it up in his Thigh, by virtue of which he did his wondrous Works.

Celsus, than whom there never was a more virulent Enemy of Christianity, and who lived in the second Century after our Saviour, when the knowledge of these things must have been fresh, instead of absolutely denying the Truth of Christ's Miracles, (which he would have done if there had been any room for it) ascribes them to his Skill in magical

gical Arts; and that upon the Strength of the strange Things he perform'd, he set up for a God: See *Origen contra Celsum*, Lib. 1. p. 7, 22, 30.

It was because the Miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles could not be contested, that some of the Pagans bethought themselves of setting up that Impostor *Apollonius Tyanæus* and his pretended Miracles in opposition to him. Particularly *Hierocles* writ a Book to that purpose, which *Eusebius* answer'd; who has proved that *Philostratus*, who pretended to write *Apollonius's* Life, is an idle romantick Writer unworthy of Credit; that he himself doubts of the Miracles he relates; that he frequently contradicts himself, and relates many things that are plainly fabulous and ridiculous: and indeed any one that reads *Philostratus's* Life of *Apollonius Tyanæus*, must make the same Reflections. At present I shall only observe, that when *Hierocles* in that Book where he highly extols *Apollonius Tyanæus* above Jesus Christ, accuses the Christians for setting up Christ for a God, on the account of a few Wonders and Prodigies [*ολιγαί τερατεῖαι*] that he did, he plainly shews that he could not deny that Jesus did some wonderful Things, even whilst he endeavours to extenuate them. But if *Apollonius* did as many and as great Miracles as Jesus, as he would have us believe, and that in favour of the reigning Religion and Idolatry, which had all worldly Advantages on its side, how comes it that he and his Miracles so soon fell into Obscurity and Contempt, when the Name and Miracles of Jesus spread through the whole World, and his Religion triumph'd every-where, though it had no worldly Advantages to recommend it, and had all the Powers of the World engag'd against it?

Julian the Apostate, whose Hatred to Christianity is well known, bears witness to the Truth of Christ's Miracles, even where he affects to speak

of them in a very diminishing degrading manner. He tells us, that *Jesus did nothing worthy of note, except a Man will reckon the healing the Lame and Blind, and casting out Devils in the Villages of Bethsaida and Bethany to have been very great Works.* See Cyril. Alex. cont. Julian. lib. 6. And if he cannot deny these, he ought to acknowledge the other wonderful Facts recorded in the Gospel, which come to us with the same Evidence.

To these Testimonies of Persons that were avow'd Enemies to Christianity, and who continued such, might justly be added the Testimonies of those who of Pagans became Christians upon the Evidence of these Facts; many of whom were Men of great Worth and Learning, and who lived very near the Times in which these Facts were done; concerning which, see Mr. Addison's Treatise of the *Christian Religion*, Sect. III. and IV. But without having recourse to particular Testimonies, the Propagation of Christianity, as things were circumstanced, is itself a manifest Proof of the Truth of those Facts, on which that Religion is founded; but as this well deserves a distinct Consideration, it shall be the Subject of the following Chapter.



C H A P. VI.

That the wonderful Success the Gospel met with, and its speedy and general Propagation, furnishes a strong Proof of the Truth of those Facts on which it is founded. The Author's Exceptions against this consider'd.

ANY one that impartially considers the Nature of the Christian Religion, the Instruments and Means made use of to propagate it, and the great

great Difficulties and Opposition it met with from the beginning, will be apt to conclude that it could not possibly have made so sudden and wonderful a Progress as we find it did, if the extraordinary Facts on which it was founded and supported had not been true. The first Preachers of Christianity that went forth to disciple the Nations, were the most unlikely Men in the World to succeed in such an Attempt. Obscure and mean in their Original, poor and despised, without Riches to bribe Men to embrace their Doctrine, without Power to force them to it, without the Charms of Oratory to persuade them, without the Advantages of human Learning and Philosophy to recommend them. The Scheme of Religion they introduced had nothing in it to flatter Mens Vices, to humour their Prejudices, or to promote their worldly Interests. They came in the Name of one that had been crucified, whom they proposed to Mankind as their Saviour and their Lord. The Doctrine they preach'd was directly contrary to the prevailing Prejudices both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*. To the *Jews* they preach'd a suffering *Messiah*, destitute of all outward worldly Pomp and Grandeur, and the Author of a pure and spiritual Salvation; that the Law of *Moses*, with its peculiar Rites and Ceremonies, was to give way to a more pure and perfect Dispensation; that all Distinction of Nations and Families was now to be taken away, and the *Gentiles* to be taken into the same Church with the *Jews*, and interested in the same glorious Privileges; and every body knows, that nothing could possibly be more contrary than all this was to the most favourite Notions, and inveterate Prejudices of the *Jews*, to which they were obstinately addicted. And at the same time the Doctrine of the Gospel was also directly contrary to all the Prejudices of the *Gentiles*. It subverted the whole Frame of their Re-

ligion, which had the Prescription of many Ages to plead; it cast Contempt on all their adored Deities, under whom they thought they had so long flourish'd, and whom they regarded as the Founders and Guardians of their Prosperity and Empire; it discarded all their pompous Rites and Ceremonies, and overturn'd their Images and Altars, and introduced a spiritual Worship, destitute of outward Pomp and Shew. Its Precepts were pure and spiritual, contrary to their most favourite Passions and Appetites, and forbid those Impurities which had hitherto been freely indulged. It opposed and overthrew the darling Tenets of many of the most celebrated Sects of Philosophers. Accordingly no sooner did it appear, but it met with the greatest Opposition both from *Jews* and *Gentiles*. It had the Learning and Subtlety of the Philosophers, the Artifices and Influence of the Priests, the Bigotry and Superstition of the Vulgar, the rooted Prejudices both of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, the vicious Appetites and Passions of Men engaged against it, and no worldly Advantages to recommend it. Add to this, that the first Publishers and Professors of this Religion were immediately exposed, not only to Obloquy and Reproach, but to the most cruel Persecutions and all manner of Sufferings. Of the Barbarities that were exercised towards them in the Reign of *Nero*, in the very Infancy of the Christian Church, *Tacitus*, who was very far from being a Friend to Christianity, is an unexceptionable Witness; who tells us, *a huge multitude* [*ingens multitudo*] of them suffer'd. So mightily had they increased in *Rome* itself in a very short time; for this was not above thirty Years after our Saviour's Crucifixion; and he gives us an Account of the terrible Torments to which they were exposed. See *Tacit. Annal. lib. 15*. And afterwards there was almost a continued Succession

cession of the most grievous Persecutions raised against them. And yet notwithstanding all these Obstacles and Discouragements, the Christian Religion soon grew mightily and prevail'd. Many *Myriads* (for so it ought to be render'd, and not as it is in our Translation *Thousands*) of the *Jews* embraced it, *Acts* 21. 20. vast Numbers of Heathens all over the World were daily converted, and became so zealous for it in opposition to the Superstition in which they had been educated, that they chose to lay down their Lives rather than renounce it.

Justin Martyr, who flourish'd about a hundred Years after our Saviour's Crucifixion, declares that in his Time, "there was no Nation of Men, whether *Barbarians* or *Greeks*, or by whatsoever Name they were called, among whom Prayers and Thanksgivings were not offered to the Father and Maker of the Universe, through the Name of the crucified Jesus;" see *Just. Mart. Dial. cum Tryph.* What *Tertullian* says concerning the vast Multitude of Christians in his Time about the end of the second Century, is well known. Or if our Author will not believe the Accounts of the wonderful Progress of the Gospel, and of the Constancy with which the primitive Christians endur'd Persecution, given by Christian Writers, let him believe *Pliny*, a learned Heathen; who in his celebrated Epistle to *Trajan*, often quoted on this occasion, not only takes notice of the divine Honours that the Christians paid to Christ, and of their Firmness to their Religion, which he calls an inflexible Obstinacy, at the same time giving a noble Testimony to the Purity and Innocency of their Lives and Manners; but represents them as vastly numerous; that many of every Age, and of all Orders and Degrees had embraced Christianity; "that the Contagion of that Superstition (as he calls

calls it) “ had invaded not only the Cities and
 “ Towns, but the Villages and Country-places;
 “ that the Temples of the Gods were almost de-
 “ solate, the solemn sacred Rites long neglected;
 “ and that there were very few that would buy the
 “ Sacrifices.” [And this to be sure made the Hea-
 then Priests very zealous to suppress them.] See
Plin. Lib. 10. Ep. 97. ad Trajan. It must be ob-
 served, that it was in seventy Years after the Death
 of our Saviour that *Pliny* wrote this. In so short
 a time had Christianity made an amazing Pro-
 gress, though it had all the Powers of the World
 engag’d against it, and no worldly Advantages on
 its side.

Now it is impossible to account for this, without
 owning the Truth of those glorious and miraculous
 Attestations that were given at the first Establish-
 ment of the Christian Religion. The first Preachers
 of it pretended to prove their divine Mission and
 the Divinity of the Religion they introduced, by
 the most extraordinary *Signs and Wonders*, and
divers Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost. These
 things were not done in a Corner, but in the View
 of the World, and before their Enemies themselves,
 who were both very watchful and industrious, and
 had Opportunities enough to have discover’d the
 Cheat, if there had been any. And if those Facts
 to which they appeal’d as the Proofs and Attestations
 of their Mission had not been true, they and
 their Religion, which had no outward Advantages
 to recommend it, must immediately have fallen in-
 to Contempt and Obscurity, and the World had
 heard of them no more.

Our Author observes indeed, that never was
 there *any Religion that in a short time gain’d so*
many Profelytes as that of Mahomet, p. 407 *. But
 the Progress of *Mahometanism* has nothing in it
 very

* P. 369.

very surprizing. It may be easily accounted for, if we consider the Nature of that Religion, which was so contrived as *to make Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof* in this Life; at the same time that it proposed a sensual Paradise in a future State, where its Votaries should revel in all carnal Delights, and in a full Gratification of their Appetites; but especially if we consider the Method prescrib'd by the first Founder of that Religion, and which he and his Successors made use of to propagate it, which was by Force and the Terror of Arms. They spread their Conquests over a great Part of *Asia*, and took all possible Care to establish their Religion wherever they came. It is no wonder that such a Religion, so cunningly accommodated to the vicious Appetites of Men, and propagated by such Methods of worldly Bribes and Terrors, should prevail as it has done. But if *Mahomet* had done nothing but preach, and sent ten or a dozen of his Followers to publish through the World that he was the great Prophet sent of God to bring a perfect Religion, he and his Religion would have been long since buried in Oblivion; or if taken notice of in History, would have made just such another Figure there as *David George* or *Henry Nicholas*.

Our Author, speaking of the strong Biass there is in human Nature towards Superstition, tells us, " There are two ways which never fail to make Superstition prevail, Mysteries to amuse the Enthusiasts, especially the Pretenders to deep Learning, and all that admire what they do not understand; and gaudy Shews and pompous Ceremonies, to amuse the Vulgar." And he adds, " That the Popish Church, whose Conduct shews how well they understand their Interest, may vie with the old *Egyptian* Church for Mysteries; and Pagan *Rome* must yield to Christian

" *Rome*

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“ *Rome* in such Shews, Rites, and Ceremonies,
 “ as dazzle the Eyes of the People, and insensibly
 “ gain their Hearts, p. 169, 170*.

Now to apply this Observation to the present Occasion. 'Tis certain that the Christian Religion, considered in its original Simplicity, as delivered by Christ and his Apostles, had none of those gaudy Shews, that outward Pomp of Rites and Splendor of Ceremonies which is so apt to attract the Eyes and Admiration of the Multitude; and which we may be sure it would have had, if it had been cunningly contrived by worldly Politicians. And what makes this still more remarkable is, that at the time when Christianity first appear'd, the Vulgar both amongst the *Heathens* and *Jews* were immoderately addicted to Pomp and Shew in Religion. As to the *Heathens*, they had every thing in their Religion to amuse and please the Imagination. Beautiful Images, magnificent Temples, a variety of Rites fitted to captivate the Vulgar; and even the publick Sports and Shews made a part of their Religion. And hence they often objected it against the Christians, that they had no Temples, no Altars, no Sacrifices or Images; *Nullas aras habent, templa nulla, nulla nota simulachra*, as *Cæcilius* expresses it in *Minucius Felix*. The *Jews* were also accustomed to a pompous ceremonious Worship, and therefore despised the plain simple Worship of the Gospel. And this must have been a very powerful Prejudice against Christianity, and have effectually hindred its Reception, if it had not been accompanied with such extraordinary Attestations.

And as to Mysteries, whatever Influence we may suppose them to have upon *Enthusiasts and Pretenders to deep Learning* (as this Gentleman speaks) 'tis evident that the Christian Religion had no
 Mysteries

Mysteries that were to be conceal'd from the Vulgar, as in other Religions; no *Arcana* that were to be peculiar to the Priests and to the profoundly Learned; but all its Doctrines were equally published to all. That which is the great Mystery of the Gospel, the Doctrine of our Redemption through a crucified Saviour, had little in it at first View to recommend it to the Esteem of Mankind. It was, as the Apostle represents it, *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks, those Pretenders to deep Learning, Foolishness*; and therefore this Mystery, instead of promoting the Reception of the Gospel, was a powerful Prejudice against it both with *Jews and Gentiles*.

This Writer, who in the Passage already cited seems to think that the having deep Mysteries in it recommends a Religion to the Esteem of Mankind, elsewhere represents the being destitute of Mysteries as one Reason why Mahometanism has made so large a Progress. He tells us from F. *Maracci*, that “the Mahometan Religion has
“ whatever is plausible in the Christian Religion,
“ and those Things which are agreeable to the
“ Light of Nature, and intirely excludes those
“ Mysteries which at first View seem incredible
“ and impossible, and especially which are thought
“ too high for human Nature; and therefore the
“ modern Worshippers of Idols more easily and
“ readily embrace the Saracens Law, than that of
“ the Gospel, p. 407, 408.” If by Mysteries he means any thing contrary to the evident Dictates of Reason, I deny there are any such in the Christian Religion, as delivered in the Gospel; though according to F. *Maracci*'s Notion of it, who took Popery for Christianity, he might well suppose that there are Mysteries which *seem incredible and impossible*; such is that portentous Mystery of
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Transubstantiation, which has been and still is an invincible Prejudice both to *Turks* and *Jews*. But though I deny there are any Mysteries in the Christian Religion contrary to plain Sense and Reason, yet I own there are Mysteries in it contrary to Men's rooted Prejudices, and which at first view have no plausible Appearance of worldly Wisdom to recommend them. Such is the Mystery of the Cross, which I have already mentioned. If the Apostles had pretended that Christ was crucified only in appearance, and another crucified in his stead, since God would never have suffered so excellent and divine a Person to be thus treated; which was the Fiction of some Hereticks of old, and adopted by *Mahomet* into his *Alcoran*: this might have had some plausible Shew to amuse those that are delighted with Things wonderful. But the first Preachers of the Christian Religion, instead of concealing Christ's Crucifixion, made this the great fundamental Article of their Faith. They *preach'd Jesus Christ and him crucified*, and even gloried in his Cross, though the *Jews* and *Gentiles* continually objected it against them. And it appears from the bitter Sarcasms of *Celsus* and others, what advantage the Enemies of the Gospel endeavoured to take from thence to expose Christianity. And indeed this very Doctrine which lies at the Foundation of the Christian Faith, would have been an effectual Obstacle to the Propagation of it, if it had not been attended with such glorious Demonstrations of a divine Power, and such illustrious Proofs as plainly demonstrated, that him whom *the Jews with wicked Hands had crucified*, God had exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to Mankind, and had declared him to be the Son of God with Power, by the Resurrection from the Dead.

To invalidate the Proof drawn from the sudden and extraordinary Diffusion of the Gospel, our Au-
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thor intimates that the People to whom the Gospel was first preach'd, were so very foolish that any thing might be imposed on them. He tells us, p. 309 *. that *Men could not well be lower in point of Understanding, than those to whom the Gospel was first preach'd.* But let us suppose them ever so ignorant and illiterate, I think it is but reasonable to allow that they had their Senses. And if so, they could certainly tell whether those wonderful Works, to which the first Preachers of Christianity appealed as Proofs of their divine Mission, were really wrought among them in open View or not. They could hardly be persuaded that they saw these Things done before their Eyes if they did not see them. When the Apostle *Paul* tells the *Corinthians* of the *Signs and Wonders and mighty Deeds* he had wrought among them, 2 Cor. 12. 12. and writes to them concerning the variety of *spiritual Gifts* among them, whether *Prophecy*, or *speaking with Tongues*, or *working of Miracles*, &c. and gives them Rules for the right management of those Gifts, 1 Cor. chap. 12. 14. could they not tell whether they had those extraordinary Gifts among them or not? Would it have been possible for him to persuade them that such and such Things were done before their Eyes, and that they themselves were Partakers of such wonderful Gifts and extraordinary Powers, and that this was a Fact publickly known to them all, if there had been no such thing among them? Must they not in that Case have look'd upon all he said, and the Rules he gave for the right management of those Gifts, to be mere Banter and Imposition?

But after all, I don't know what Reason this Gentleman has to speak so contemptibly of those to whom the Gospel was first published. One would think by his Account, that the Apostles
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went preaching among wild and barbarous Savages, utter Strangers to all Learning and Knowledge, rather than among the polite Nations of *Greece* and *Rome*. And yet it is certain that Christianity was first published in that part of the World, which then was, and for a considerable Time before had been, the most learned and the most civiliz'd part of the Earth, among whom Philosophy and all the liberal Arts had made a very great Progress. The Apostles preached and made Converts not merely in obscure Villages, but in *Antioch*, *Ephesus*, *Corinth*, *Theſſalonica*, *Athens*, celebrated Cities, and in *Rome* it-self, the Seat of Learning and Politeness, and even among some of *Cæſar's* Household.

'Tis true, that notwithstanding the Nations in which the Gospel was first published were the most civiliz'd Parts of the then known World, and had made great Improvements in the Arts of civil Life, and in Eloquence and polite Learning, yet they had in a great measure lost the Knowledge of the only living and true God and of their Duty; they were universally over-run with Idolatry and Superstition, and had sunk into a general and amazing Corruption of Manners. This shews both the need they stood in of a divine Revelation, and that accompanied with the most extraordinary Attestations from Heaven, to awaken the Attention of Mankind, and it also shews the great Difficulties the Gospel had to encounter with and overcome. But our Author, who is resolv'd to object against Christianity on every Supposition, endeavours to turn even this to its prejudice. " It is no
 " Compliment (says he) to Revelation (though
 " the Doctor [*viz.* Dr. *Clark*] designed it as the
 " highest) to say, it prevailed when the Light of
 " Nature was, as he supposes, in a manner extinct;
 " since then an irrational Religion might as easi-
 " ly

ly. obtain, as a rational one, p. 381*." All that I can make of the Author's Argument is this, that it is no compliment to Revelation, no proof of its Usefulness, to say it came when Mankind stood in the greatest need of it. It is hard to content these Gentlemen. If it had been said, that the Christian Revelation came in a time of great Light and Knowledge, when Men made the best use of their Reason, and had the right knowledge of God and of Religion, then it was perfectly useless, and answered no valuable End at all; natural Light was clear enough without it. If it came in a time when Men were sunk into great Darkness and Corruption, and into an Ignorance of the most important Points of natural Religion, this also must be turn'd to its disadvantage. For *if the Light of Nature was almost extinguished, an irrational Religion might as easily obtain as a rational one.* I grant it might on such a Supposition, and more easily too, provided it accommodated it self to their wrong Notions and Prejudices, flattered their Vices and humoured their Passions, and came recommended with mighty worldly Advantages. But if not, if it was quite contrary to their most inveterate Prejudices, had nothing in it to flatter their sensual Part or sooth their vicious Appetites, and if it tended utterly to subvert that pompous Superstition that had been so long established, and which had so many Things to recommend it to their corrupt Taste, it can scarce be conceived how it should prevail in a corrupt and degenerate World at all; the greater their Corruption was, the greater need they stood in of it, and at the same time the less disposed were they to receive it.

He must certainly have a very odd turn of Mind, that can suppose that the Christian Revelation's

lation's being sent when it was most wanted, was a Proof or even a Presumption of its being irrational; since in this case the giving this Revelation was an Act of signal Goodness; and the deeper Men were sunk into Idolatry and Superstition, the more difficult it was to reclaim them from it. It must be very difficult in such a Case for a pure and spiritual Religion, that tended to subvert the whole Frame of that Superstition to which they were so strongly addicted, and to ingage them to abandon their vicious Courses, and to enter on a new Life of Purity and Virtue, so much as to gain Attention. Nor can it be conceived how such a Religion as the Christian could possibly have been received in such Circumstances, and could have made such a sudden and wonderful Progress, if it had not been attended with a Divine Power, and with the most illustrious Attestations from Heaven. Thus I have gone thro' what I thought necessary for setting the Evidences of Christianity in a just Light, and have endeavoured to obviate the Author's Exceptions against them.

And from what has been offered, we may judge whether this Writer fairly states the Argument, when he supposes all *traditionary Religions*, as he calls them, to be upon a Level; that there is no more to be said for one than for another, and that all that any have to say for their Religion *depends intirely upon the Words of the Priests*, p. 232, 234, 236*. That they have no reason to believe it to be a true Religion, but because their Priests 'who are hired to maintain it, tell them it was a long time ago revealed to certain Persons, who, as they on their Priestly Words assure them, were too wise to be imposed on themselves, and too honest to impose on others; and that no change could have been made in their Religion

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* P. 209, 210

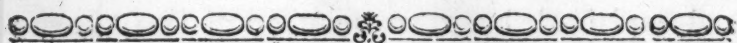
‘ in After-Times, the Care Men have of their own
‘ Souls as well as their natural Affections for Poster-
‘ rity, obliging them from Generation to Gene-
‘ ration, to hand down their Religion just as they
‘ received it; and that it was morally impossible
‘ Innovations should creep in, since it would be
‘ the highest Folly in any to attempt to introduce
‘ any Doctrines as a Tradition, received from
‘ their Ancestors, when all must know they had
‘ received no such Tradition; and that tho’ other
‘ Priests have imposed gross Falshoods, yet our
‘ own Priests are such faithful Representers of
‘ things, that we may as well question the Truth
‘ of all History, as the Truth of things believed
‘ on their Authority.’ This he represents as all
that can be urged for the Truth and Uncorrupt-
ness of any traditionary Religion, and as pleaded
with equal Confidence by Men of all Religions,
p. 233.

But nothing can be more unfair than this Repre-
sentation. He here evidently confounds oral and
written Tradition, as if it were not possible to have
any other Proofs for the Truth and Integrity of
the Scriptures, than what may be and are pro-
duced by the Papists for the certainty of oral Tra-
dition. As in several other Passages of his Book,
he supposes Popery and Christianity to be on the
same foundation, so here the Argument he puts
into the mouths of the People, and which he re-
presents as the only one they can bring for their
Religion, is what no Protestant can make use of.
For it supposes that there could not possibly be
any Innovation at all introduced at any time into
Religion; when all Protestants own there have
been many such; and what distinguishes them as
Protestant is their rejecting those Corruptions and
Innovations, and reducing Religion to its primi-
tive Purity, as laid down in the sacred original

Records of Christianity. It will be easily acknowledged that oral Tradition is a very uncertain Conveyance of Doctrines and Facts, and admits of great Corruptions and Alterations in a long Succession of Years; and the Argument here produced by the Author, if applied to prove that there could be no Changes or Alterations in what is thus transmitted, is ridiculously weak, and what Archbishop Tillotson has sufficiently expos'd in his *Rule of Faith*. But it pleas'd God so to order it, that the sacred Doctrines of Christianity and the principal Facts on which it is founded, were committed to Writing as a much surer Conveyance; and whatever Corruptions and Alterations may have been introduced amongst professed Christians, whilst those sacred Writings continue uncorrupted, Christianity is safe: and by the help of those Writings the People may at all times be enabled to know genuine primitive Christianity, and to discover and reject the Corruptions and Errors that the Priests or others have at any time endeavour'd to introduce. And that these Writings have been transmitted to us without any material Corruption or Alteration, may be demonstrated by Arguments, of the Strength of which the meanest of the People may judge, if they will but apply themselves to consider them with such a degree of Attention as they use in matters of much less consequence.

If he had fairly propos'd the Argument thus, That considering the sacred Writings were immediately dispersed into many hands in the very Age in which they were written, and received by the Christians with extraordinary Veneration; that they were read in the Christian Assemblies from the beginning; that they were soon translated into several Languages, and spread to distant Nations; that they have been ever since constantly cited
and

and referr'd to in every Age; commented upon and explained by great numbers of Persons who have transcribed large Portions of them into their Writings; that as those Copies were dispersed all over the World, so it never was in the power of any Party of Men to get all the Copies into their own hands, nor consequently to corrupt them all; that they have been constantly appealed to in every Age by Men in other things of very different Opinions: And as there have been all along different Sects and Parties among Christians, so if one Set of Priests had endeavoured to corrupt them, another would have soon detected and exposed the Forgery; that therefore let us suppose the Priests to have been ever so willing or desirous to corrupt them, it was not in their power to do it universally; and that we have the highest Proof that they have not done so; since 'tis evident in fact, that they have not corrupted them where it was most their Interest to do it; nor is there any thing in the Scriptures to countenance their Schemes of Ambition and Power, or any of those Corruptions and Innovations that were afterwards introduced; but on the contrary from these very Writings those Corruptions and Innovations have been most successfully exposed: There is nothing in this way of arguing, but what is obvious to a common Capacity. And it sufficiently appears from it, that the People have far more than merely the Word or Honesty of their Priests to depend upon, for the Purity and Incorruption of the sacred Writings.



C H A P. VII.

An Examination of the Author's Objections against Scripture, drawn from the Nature and Manner of the Revelation there contain'd; and First, his Attempt to prove that it is Uncertain and Obscure. His general Argument from the Ambiguity and Uncertainty of Words, to shew that we are not to be govern'd by Words but Things; and what he offers concerning the Scriptures being in dead Languages, and that the Translations are not to be depended on, consider'd. That many of his Objections against the Scriptures are such as would not be endured if offered against any other Writings.

HAVING vindicated the external Proofs and Evidences of Christianity from the Author's Exceptions, I proceed now to consider the Objections he offers drawn from the nature of the Revelation it self. These Objections are of various kinds, scattered without any Order throughout his Book, but especially in the 13th Chapter, which is nothing but a Collection of whatever he thought most proper to expose the Scriptures. I shall, that I may proceed in some Method, tho' this Writer observes none, digest his Objections into several Heads or Articles.

1st, Some of his Objections tend to shew, that the Scriptures are obscure and unintelligible; that the Sense of them is uncertain, and not to be depended

pended on, and consequently, that they are of no use at all ; nor therefore a Revelation from God ; since, as he observes, if God gives a Revelation at all, it must be clear, or else it cannot answer the End for which it was given.

2dly, That there are many things in Scripture contrary to Reason and unworthy of God, and which tend to lead People wrong in their Notions of Things, both with relation to God and the Duty they owe to him, and with relation to the Duties they owe to one another.

3dly, That there is a Contrast between the Spirit of the Old Testament and the New.

After having obviated the Author's Objections on these several Heads, I shall take particular notice of what he offers against the Mosaick Account of the Fall, and shall vindicate the Christian Account of the Mediator ; and conclude with considering the Objection against the Christian Revelation drawn from its not being of universal Extent, and from its late Appearance, as well as from the Corruptions of Christians.

I shall begin with considering the Attempt the Author makes to shew, that the Scriptures are obscure and unintelligible, and that the Sense of them is uncertain and not to be depended on ; that is, that they are so obscure and uncertain, that they can be of no use to the Vulgar to direct them in their Faith and Practice, and in what is of Importance to them to know and to do in order to Salvation. For this is the Point to be prov'd.

And that we may the better judge of this, I shall first lay down some Principles, which I hope will be thought very reasonable.

And 1. One Principle which I think very reasonable is this, That Instructions may be communicated by Word or Writing, and that Instructions thus communicated may be very useful to Man-

kind. It may seem a little odd to be obliged to prove this. Yet a considerable part of what our Author advances in his thirteenth Chapter, with great Pomp and Shew of Argument, against the Intelligibleness and Clearness of the Scriptures, equally proves that it is impossible for us to understand any Words or Writings whatsoever; that no Doctrines can be intelligibly taught or communicated by Word or Writing, (that is, that they cannot be taught or communicated at all, for I know no other way one Man has of communicating his Sentiments to another but by Word or Writing) and that no Man can be sure of another's Meaning, or can receive any Instruction from what is thus communicated.

To this purpose he takes a great deal of pains to shew the Ambiguity of Words, and the various Significations they are capable of, of which he produces several Instances, p. 319*, &c. He observes, that "Words are the arbitrary Marks of Mens Ideas;" and that "the Meaning of Words, as well as the Words themselves, are continually changing, and 'tis as impossible to fix the one as the other;" and that "we see by the innumerable verbal Disputes, which happen even among learned Men, how different their Ideas are; and perhaps there are not three Persons, who when they talk abstractedly, have precisely the same Ideas, though they use the same Words." He instances in "the different Explications given of the Words *divine Person*, *Essence*, *Trinity*, *Messiah*, *Incarnation*," &c. p. 289†. To the Ambiguity of Words, and the various Significations that may be put upon them, he attributes all the Changes that have happen'd in what he calls traditional Religion; which he proves from the many Divisions in the primitive Times, and

* P. 289.

† P. 261.

and the many Changes that have happen'd since ; particularly in *England* at the time of the Reformation, when the whole Body of the Clergy and Laity changed their Religion three times in twelve Years, &c. and he mentions the Variations of our Clergy since in Doctrine and Discipline, though their Calvinistical Articles still continue the same, p. 286, 287 *. Nor are the Ambiguities owing merely to the different Meanings of Words in different Languages ; for he observes, that “ had “ there been but one Language, and a Book writ “ in that Language in indelible Characters without any various Readings, and all could have “ Access to it ; yet even then, considering how “ uncertain the Meaning of Words are, and the “ Interests of designing Men to put a wrong Sense “ upon them, it must be morally impossible that “ Religion could long continue the same, p. 288 *. On all these accounts he infers, that *we are to be govern'd not by Words but Things* ; and inveighs against those whose Religion depends on *Words thus dubious, and not on the Reason and Nature of Things obvious to the meanest Capacity.*

But certainly if there be any thing in his way of arguing, it will prove that there is no more Certainty in *Things* than in *Words*. If the different Senses that are put upon Words, or which they are capable of, be a sufficient Argument to shew that *Words* cannot be depended on, the same way of Reasoning will prove that neither can we have a certain Knowledge of *Things* ; since 'tis evident that these are also capable of being misunderstood and taken various ways ; and that amongst Persons pretending to Learning and Philosophy, who have profess'd to make the Reason of Things their Rule, some have had vastly different Notions of what is supposed to be built on the Reason and Nature of Things

Things from others. I see therefore no other Tendency in this Author's way of talking, but to introduce universal Scepticism. But nothing can be more unjust. It does not prove that Words or Things may not be certainly understood, because there have been Controversies about them ; for the plainest Words in the World, the Meaning of which is obvious enough to the Generality of Readers or Hearers, and so also the plainest Things may be perverted and perplex'd with Controversies. I think it might easily be demonstrated, that most of the Controversies that have disturb'd the Christian Church, and the Changes that have happen'd there, have not been owing to the Ambiguity of Words or Scripture-Phrases, but to the Prejudices, the Passions, and Interests of Men ; they have not been generally owing to Mens governing themselves by the sacred Writings, (the Sense of which they honestly mistook) but to their setting up other Rules. And those Corruptions that have been introduced, have been always then most happily rectified, when Men have had recourse to those Writings. Thus with regard to the Popish Controversies, in most of them the Sense of the Scriptures is plain enough, as the Guides of that Church well know, and therefore will not suffer the Laity to read it. For who ever from Scripture alone could have found out the Doctrines of Purgatory, the Authority and Infallibility of the Pope, Worship in an unknown Tongue, Image-worship, Invocation of Saints and Angels, &c ? If the whole Body of the *Clergy and People in England chang'd their Religion three times in twelve Years*, who besides this Author would have ascrib'd this only to the Ambiguity of Words and Phrases in the Sense of which they were mistaken, and not rather to other Causes, to the Influence of civil Authority, to the Force of secular Interests and Motives, to worldly

worldly Bribes and Terrors? But at the same time there were many Instances of Persons that acted upon Conviction and Evidence, and shew'd a noble Steadiness in their Religion, for which they endur'd the severest Sufferings.

Our Author, to shew how easily the Sense of Words may be mistaken, instances in the Apostles themselves, who after three Years Converse with Jesus himself were ignorant of the End of his Mission; and were for a long time before they understood the Meaning of *Teach all Nations*, and *Preach the Gospel to every Creature*, &c. see p. 287. But all that can be gather'd from this is, the mighty Power of Prejudice, which often hinders Men from discerning the plainest Words, and so it often does from discerning the plainest Things. To this it was owing, that when our Saviour told them of the Sufferings he was to undergo at *Jerusalem*, they did not understand him, though nothing could be plainer than the Words he made use of on that Occasion, *Luke* 18. 31, 32, &c. And indeed considering the obstinate Prejudices which the Disciples as well as the *Jews* in general had so deeply imbib'd, 'tis no wonder that they were a long time before they abandon'd the Hopes of the Messiah's temporal Kingdom, or thought that the Distinction between *Jews* and *Gentiles* was to be taken away. And their being brought to it with so much difficulty, is a strong Proof that this Scheme of Religion was not of their own Invention, and that their Testimony concerning Christ's Resurrection, and the extraordinary Effusion of the Holy Ghost, is to be depended on.

Our Author needed not to have produced the Authority of *Stapleton*, that learned *Writer*, as he calls him, and of the Author of *Traëtatus Theologico-politicus*, to shew that the Words of Scripture are sometimes taken in contrary Senses; he instances
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in the Words *Nature, Spirit, and Spirit of God*; see p. 337 *. Many Instances might be brought of this kind in all Books and Languages whatsoever. But does this prove, that therefore no Books at all can be depended on, or the Meaning of them certainly understood? Even in the Instances he mentions, the Circumstances of the Context do for the most part plainly determine the Sense. But he seems to demand, that the Words of Scripture be taken separately, without considering what goes before or follows after; and at this rate no Book in the World will be intelligible.

If Divines have given different Explications of the Words *divine Person, Essence, Incarnation, &c.* so also have the words *God, Providence, Man's Free-agency or Liberty, Virtue, Honour, Matter, Spirit, &c.* been taken in various and different Senses. Nor is it any more certain that Men when talking of these things have the same Ideas of them, than when they talk of Matters of pure Revelation. And is there nothing therefore ever to be said on these Subjects, or are all Instructions of Philosophers and Moralists, the best and wisest Men in all Ages, on these Heads, needless and useless, because different Persons may have different Ideas under the same Expressions? It might be also shewn, that with regard to civil and political Matters, Words are as liable to be misunderstood, and as capable of having various Senses put upon them, as in the other; and even in things that are the Objects of our Senses, (which yet our Author excepts, p. 290 †.) 'tis not certain that all Men have *the same precise Number of Ideas* under each Expression; which yet he seems to require, and without which he thinks there would be great Confusion.

But all this does not hinder, and though he had offer'd a great deal more about the Ambiguity of Words,

* P. 305, 306.

† P. 262.

Words, and their various Significations, (many hundred Instances of which every Lexicon would have furnish'd him with) it would not hinder but that we may for the most part be sufficiently certain of their Meaning, whether made use of in speaking or writing; and Men can generally understand one another well enough both in civil and religious Matters. And if not, why did this Author give himself the trouble to write a Book, to recover Mankind from Superstition? I have indeed met with many Ambiguities in his way of writing, and have reason to think that some of them are affectedly so; yet I think I can pretty well understand his Meaning and Design, and I doubt not he will be able to comprehend mine.

It is an Instance of our Author's Art, that in all that he offers on this Head, he opposes *Words* to *Things*; that is, he strips Words of their Meaning, and then it will be own'd they are mere senseless Characters. For what are *Words* design'd for, but to convey a Notion of *Things*? and if they don't serve for this, they are good for nothing. The Question is not, as this Writer seems willing to state it, whether we are to be govern'd by *Words* or *Things*? as if the one of these was to be separated from the other; but the Question is, whether the Knowledge of *Things* may not be communicated by *Words*, or whether verbal or written Instructions may not be of signal use for conveying to Men a Knowledge of those *Things*, which it is of importance to them to know? and whether this is not better for the Bulk of Mankind, than to be left merely to themselves without any Teaching or Instruction, to collect their Duty from the Reason and Nature of Things, by the mere Force of their own Sagacity? And if, notwithstanding all the Uncertainties of Language, Men may receive great Benefit from the Labours and Writings of wise
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and learned Men, why may they not also receive still greater Benefit from a divine Revelation expressed in human Language? and why may it not be supposed worthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God to send some Persons for this purpose, to instruct Mankind in his Will and their Duty?

I have hitherto thought that the Benefit of Language, peculiar to Men above the Brutes, whereby we are capable of communicating our Knowledge and Ideas, was a very great Privilege. But I don't see but that according to our Author, we had better be without Speech, yea, and without Reason too; for his way of talking will hold against the one as well as the other, since a great deal might be offer'd concerning the Uncertainty of Reason, and the Abuse that has been made of it. If there be any thing in his Argument, it tends to prove that all Words and Writings are perfectly useless, and even pernicious, and so is all Learning and Instruction; especially when applied to those Subjects, which are best worth talking and writing about, the Matters of Religion and Morality. Men must be left wholly to themselves; no Man must pretend to instruct another; this is but to debauch him, and turn him from hearkening to what this Writer calls the *pure simple Dictates of Nature*. All those that read Books to get Knowledge, and are willing to receive Instruction by Word or Writing, are for being govern'd not by *Things* but by *Words*; and those only are govern'd by *Things* that have no Books or *Writings* at all to mislead them. Happy therefore those Nations that are sunk in Barbarism and Ignorance, utter Strangers to all Literature, and that have none to instruct them by *Word* or *Writing*! Thus must this Gentleman, if he be consistent, with the Scriptures discard all the Writings of the Philosophers and wise Men of Antiquity, for whom he professes
so

so great an Admiration. How comes it then that we are *infinitely obliged to them* (as he says we are, p. 397*) for *writing as they did*, since their Writings cannot be of any use to communicate Instructions to Mankind, nor can we possibly be certain of their Meaning? I think there cannot be a plainer Proof that our Author is reduc'd to the last Distress in point of Argument, than that he has no other way to prove the Obscurity of the Scriptures, than by Arguments that will equally prove, that no Book in the World is intelligible. But I hope that this *reasoning Age*, as he calls it, which would be thought to have a taste of Learning and Knowledge, will not easily give into this Scheme, which has no other Tendency than to introduce universal Barbarism; and that notwithstanding all that this Gentleman offers concerning the Ambiguity of Words, they will be of opinion that Writings may be of considerable Use for communicating Knowledge, and that their Meaning may in many cases be certainly depended on.

2dly, Another Principle that I shall lay down as what all wise Men will grant, is, that it is possible for us at this distance to understand Books written a great while ago in dead Languages, so as to be sufficiently certain of the Sense of them; and that those that do not understand those Languages themselves, may yet, by the help of Translations, attain to a sufficient Certainty of what is contained in those Writings. I shall not trifle with the Reader so far as to attempt to prove this. It is what all the World grants, and what this Gentleman himself would make no scruple to allow with respect to any Book but the Scriptures. He thinks fit indeed to represent the *Bible* as “a Book, in the Interpretation of which, we must
“ necessarily

“ necessarily run into Absurdities, as being writ
 “ in a dead Language, and many Ages since, and
 “ where thro’ the vast variety of Readings, we
 “ might mistake the true Reading, &c. p. 66*.”
 and in several parts of his Book he repeats the
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 pressions: And as the Learned may understand
 those Books in the original Languages, so the
 Vulgar may easily understand them too when tran-
 slated into their own.

One would think indeed by what our Author
 offers on this Head, that he thinks it impossible to
 translate any Book out of one Language into ano-
 ther, so as to give a just and certain Account of
 the Sense of that Book. He tells us, p. 290¶.
 that

* P. 56.

¶ P. 262.

that "there are scarce any Words in any one
"Language, except of such Things as immediate-
"ly strike the Senses, that are adequately an-
"swered in another, so as exactly to comprehend
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translated out of one Language into another?

The Author takes a great deal of pains to ex-
aggerate the Difficulties of translating the Scrip-
tures, because of the *Hyperbolical, Parabolical, Mystical* Ways of Expression (which only relates
to some parts of the sacred Writings, and shall be
considered afterwards) and because it is necessary
to have an accurate Knowledge of the *ancient Man-
ners, Customs, Traditions, Philosophy, Civil and
Ecclesiastical Polity, of all which*, says he, *the com-
mon People know as little as they do of the original
Languages*, p. 290*. But it is far from being true,
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ty; yet this does not hinder but that they have
been and are translated into the modern Languages,

and all the World owns the great Usefulness of such Translations; and that tho' the Translators may be guilty of Errors, and may mistake the Sense of many particular Passages, yet Persons that are unacquainted with those Languages, may, by the help of such Translations, form a just Notion of the Meaning and Design of those original Writings, whether of an historical or moral nature.

But our Author's principal Objection against the Translation of Scripture is this, that if the People who don't understand the original Languages, must *take the Sense upon Trust*, as they are in the Translations, *this is in effect to suppose that the Religion of the Vulgar must consist in taking the Words of their Teachers, however divided amongst themselves, for the Word of God, and their Translations for Law and Gospel; and that believing them is having a divine Faith; tho' one would think whatever depended on human Traditions and Translations, is but a human Faith*, p. 293*. And he frequently repeats it, that this puts the People under a *Necessity of pinning their Faith upon the Priests who are hir'd to maintain the traditional Religion, &c.* This is the mighty Argument which he often repeats with so much Pomp, as if he thought it unanswerable: And yet nothing can be more weak. If indeed those sacred Writings were wholly in the hands of the Priests, and no other Persons had access to them, or understood the original Languages in which those Books were written, there might be some pretence for saying, that the Credit of the Translations depended wholly on the Words of the Priests [tho' even then considering that the Priests themselves are of different Parties, it can't be supposed they would all concur in a Cheat, and if one Set of Priests endeavoured

* P. 266.

voured to put something of their own upon the People for a Translation of Scripture, others of 'em would not fail to expose it] but when it is evident that there are many thousands of the Laity that understand the original Languages as well as the Priests themselves, nothing can be more unfair or disingenuous than to pretend that the Truth and Integrity of the Translations depends only on the Priests Words, and that the People have no other Security but this for their not being deceived in this matter. They have the highest moral Certainty concerning the Integrity of the Translations in all the main Facts and *Articles of Christianity* that it is possible to have. For this they have the concurring Testimony, not only of the Priests, but of thousands of others, of learned Laymen who have no Interest to deceive them, yea, and those of all the different Sects and Parties among Christians; and even of the Infidels themselves, who tho' they do not believe the Authority of the Scriptures, yet are obliged to own with respect to numberless Passages, that such is the Sense of the original Words. This furnishes a moral Certainty so strong, as lays a just Foundation for a rational Persuasion. The Man that would not depend upon such a Certainty in other Cases, would betray a very foolish Incredulity. It is upon this Foundation that I am certain there is such a place as *Paris* or *Rome*, because I find all concurring in it, and it is morally impossible they should all be in a Conspiracy to deceive me.

In other cases if Books be wrong translated, it is of no great consequence to Mankind, and it might be thought that perhaps none would think it much worth his while to inform the World of the Ignorance or Disingenuity of the Translator, but with respect to the holy Scriptures, if there were any pretended Translation of it so grossly cor-

rupt as to pervert the Sense of the whole, so that Men could not from thence form a Notion of the Christian Religion, it is impossible but it must be immediately detected and exposed.

It is to no purpose to say, as this Author frequently does, that those of different Parties among Christians translate the Scriptures different ways. Let it be allowed that they differ in the Translation of many Texts; yet still it is certain that there are great numbers, concerning which all agree that they are just Translations of the original Text; and those Passages in which they all agree are sufficient to instruct the People in all that is necessary for them to believe and practise. The lesser Differences in the Translations serve to confirm their Agreement in the main. And it may be justly affirmed, that take the most corrupt Translation of the Holy Scriptures that ever was made, it is sufficient to give the People a right Notion of the Christian Religion, or of the Faith and Morals contained in the sacred Writings. And I doubt not, a Translation of the Scriptures made by a Papist or Socinian would furnish an honest and attentive Reader with a sufficient Antidote against their Errors. Indeed in the several Controversies among Christians, the main Texts on which the chief Stress is laid, are for the most part translated alike on both sides. The Difference is not generally so much in the Translation of the Words, as in the Consequences drawn from them, and the Arguings upon them; and if there had been no Translations at all, but the original *Greek* had still continued a living Language, spoken and understood by all the People, there might have been, and probably would have been, the same Controversies that there are now. And of these the People may judge (as far as is necessary to guard them against pernicious Errors)

as well for the most part by the Translations, as if they understood the original Languages; and they may by comparing one part of the Scripture with another, in those Passages which all agree to be a just Translation of the original Text, be capable with sufficient Certainty to judge for themselves, which Opinion is most agreeable to the Sense and Scope of the divine Writer, and which Consequences are true and legitimate.

The Objections this Author urges against the Translations of Scripture, to shew that they are not to be depended on, are the same that have been urged by the Advocates for the Church of *Rome*. But then the true Reason why they argue against Translations, is not because the common People cannot understand the Scriptures when translated, but because they can understand them, and consequently by the help of such Translations would be enabled to discern, and reject the Corruptions and Innovations they have introduced. And accordingly it was by the help of the Scripture thus translated that the People at the Reformation were rescued out of the hands of their false Guides. So far are Translations from obliging the People *to pin their Faith upon their Priests*, as this Author insinuates, that they are the best Security against their Impositions. And this shews of what signal Use the Scriptures may be to the common People when translated into the vulgar Tongue. What is truly translated is as truly the Word of God, as if it were in the original Languages; and those that govern their Faith and Practice by it, do as truly govern their Faith and Practice by the Scriptures, as if they themselves understood the original Language. The Scriptures do not lose their Authority or cease to be the Scriptures when translated; no more than Laws or Statutes lose their Authority or cease to be Laws, merely when translated out

of one Language into another. And those that govern themselves by those Laws thus translated, may as truly be said to govern themselves by those Laws, as if they read them in the Original.

3dly, Another Principle that I think cannot reasonably be contested is this, that it does not prove a Book useless, or wholly unintelligible, and incapable to yield Instruction to Mankind, because there are some things in it which are obscure and difficult to be explain'd. There is scarce an Author of Antiquity, but what has some Passages so obscure, that the Learned have found great difficulty to clear the precise Meaning of them; but it does not follow, that because some Passages in an Author are obscure, and attended with Difficulties, therefore no part of the Book is plain or can be of any use at all. And if any Man should pass such a Judgment as this upon the Writings of *Plato, Cicero*, or any of the *Classicks*, it is very probable our Author would either think him not in his Senses, or at least that he did not deserve a serious Answer. Yet this is a Principle he thinks reasonable, when he is endeavouring to invalidate the Authority of the Scriptures, and to prove that they are useless and unintelligible. He tells us, p. 223*. that to suppose a Revelation *dark and mysterious in any part, is to represent it as unworthy of having God for its Author*. And he asks, *How shall we otherwise know which are plain and design'd to be understood, and which not?* *ibid.* Can any thing be more unreasonable? if there be one Passage in all the Bible that is obscure, the whole must be discarded. But would not this be thought a foolish Censure with regard to any other Book in the World, to make the Obscurity of one Passage, or of a few Passages, an Argument against the whole? And why then should this be admitted as

a sufficient Objection against the sacred Writings? In such a Book as the Scriptures, there must necessarily be many Things hard to be understood; if we consider that it is a Collection of Books written in different Ages, and some of them at a very remote distance of time from us.

There are many Parts of the Scripture that are historical, containing the History of ancient Ages and Nations from the Beginning of the World; and it is impossible but there must be some Passages relating to these Things, attended with Difficulties which we can't easily solve, for want of a perfect Understanding of those Times, their Customs, Usages, Names, and Situation of Places, &c. which yet were easy enough to them for whom they were first written. This is a Difficulty that lies against all ancient Histories, and against those most that are most ancient. But this does not prove that those ancient Histories are absolutely unintelligible; notwithstanding this, they may be and are of excellent Use for conveying to us the Knowledge of many Things which it is of great advantage to us to know, and which otherwise we could not have known.

Again, other Parts of the Scriptures are written in a poetical Style. In these it must be expected there should be bold and sublime Figures, and several ways of Expression, not so usual in Prose-writers, and which may render some Passages obscure to us at this distance. But any one that would for this pretend they are to be rejected, must for the same reason reject the finest Writings in all Antiquity, and which always have been read with Delight and Admiration. Some of the Books that have been written in this way, have been esteem'd among the most sublime and excellent of all human Composures. Will any say that it was unworthy of God, that there should be any thing of this kind

in a Book written by divine Inspiration? And if there be any Strains of divine Poetry, any Hymns or sacred Songs composed to the Honour of the Deity, and for celebrating his glorious Perfections, they must be written in a Style proper for such Composures. And I am persuaded that if it were otherwise, these Gentlemen that now find fault with the lofty figurative manner of Expression in some parts of Scripture, would then despise them as flat and low.

Our Author is pleased to instance in the 18th Psalm, in which *David represents Heaven and Earth as moved in his behalf, and his Life as cover'd with continual Miracles*, p. 333 *. That Psalm contains a noble Strain of the *Eastern Poetry*; and though the Expressions in no Composure of that kind are to be all taken in the utmost Strictness, yet the general Scope of them is very plain, viz. to signify the wonderful Interpositions of God in his Providence, in behalf of his faithful Servants; and it will remain to all Ages a Monument of *David's* Gratitude, and of his exalted Sentiments of the divine Power, Majesty, and Goodness, which are there describ'd in the most strong, and sublime, and pathetic manner. The same Observation holds with respect to many other Instances that might be produced, some of which the Author mentions, *ibid.* p. 333. as particularly the prophetic Descriptions of the Destruction of *Babylon, Idumæa, &c.* The general Design and Intention of them is obvious enough; and the strongest Figures are chosen, and such as are most proper to strike the Imagination, and to shew the Greatness and Terror of that Destruction.

It will be easily granted this Author, that pompous and hyperbolical Expressions were customary among the *Eastern Nations*. But I don't know where

* P. 302.

where he learn'd, that *this way of speaking was a main part of the Learning taught in the Schools of the Prophets among the Jews, and happy was he that could most excel in this elevated romantick way,* p. 333 *. If we may judge of the Learning taught in the Schools of the Prophets by the prophetick Writings, 'tis evident they abound in the noblest and justest Sentiments of God, and of his Attributes and his Providence; they contain the sublimest Morality, and every where teach Men to place Religion not merely in ritual Observances, but to apply themselves to real substantial Piety and Righteousness. And why may we not suppose, that such as these were the principal Things taught in the Schools of the Prophets? That they there instructed Men to form just Notions of Religion, to entertain worthy Apprehensions of the Deity, to celebrate his glorious Perfections and his wonderful Acts of Providence, and to worship him with a pure Adoration, and to abhor all Idolatry and Wickedness? 'Tis true there are many bold Figures in the Writings of the Prophets, some of which may seem a little uncouth to us, but they have for the most part a Sublimity in them, capable of raising the Imagination to the noblest Conceptions; and those strong elevated Expressions which our Author calls *romantick*, have been often admir'd by the best Judges. I doubt not but many of those Sentiments and Expressions, that have been applauded by the finest Criticks in all Ages for their Sublimity in the Writings of *Homer, Pindar, Plato, &c.* would have equally fallen under the Author's Censure, if they had been found in the sacred Writings; and I am apt to think on the other hand, that if he had met several of those very Passages he now finds fault with, in the Writings of the most celebrated Ancients among the Pagans,

Pagans, he would have found them worthy of Admiration.

Let it be granted, that there are several things in the prophetical Writings that seem obscure to us at this distance, this does not hinder but that there are many things in them of admirable use, and easily intelligible in all Ages. It is not necessary that every particular Passage should be equally understood at all times. Some things there are that more particularly concern the Persons and Ages to which they were at first deliver'd, and which were sufficiently clear and intelligible to them, though they may not appear so to us. Other Passages there are which we apprehend the Meaning of, as being clear'd up by the Accomplishment; which perhaps those to whom they were at first deliver'd, could not so easily comprehend. And many things there are of equal use to them and us, and sufficiently intelligible in all Ages. But it does not follow, either that those Passages which were easily understood at first, were useless and to no purpose, because we are not able clearly to explain them; or that those Passages which appear'd obscure to those to whom they were at first given were useless, because they did not so well comprehend the Meaning of them as we do. There are many Passages in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetical Writings, the Design of which is clear'd up in the New; and many things probably there are, which shall be clear'd up in future Ages, as relating to things that are yet to be accomplish'd; such as the Calling of the *Jews*, and a future glorious State of the Church. And when they shall be so, it will appear that the Passages relating to them, though now not very clear, were not inserted in vain; and that it was very fit such Prophecies should be given, though not fully understood till latter Ages, when
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by comparing them with the Event, there will be a full Proof of the comprehensive Knowledge and Wisdom of the divine Author. It is every way worthy of God, in giving a Revelation that should extend to all Ages, so to order it, that there should be some Things of more particular use in one Age than another, as well as many Things that should be equally useful and intelligible in all Ages.

If there be many Things in the sacred Writers that have exercised Interpreters, there are also innumerable Things that are very plain and evident to common Readers. Nor can any Argument be brought to prove, that supposing an external Revelation given, it is necessary that it should be equally clear at all Times and in all Places; which yet this Author seems to demand, p. 223, 332. It can't be proved to be at all inconsistent with the divine Wisdom, that there should be Difficulties in such a Revelation, which may exercise the Diligence of the Learned and Inquisitive, and occasion their studying it more carefully, and excite and quicken their Attention. And the Light that is struck out from time to time by a happy Discovery of the Sense and Design of some particular Passages, furnishes an agreeable Entertainment, and both encourages and rewards their Researches. And then the Vulgar, who had not Leisure or Capacity for such Inquiries, may enjoy the Benefit and Fruit of their Labours.

This Writer is pleased to mention the Epistles of *Paul* as very obscure, and as having many things in them hard to be understood, p. 333, 334*. Suppose it to be so, yet still it is certain that the main Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity are deliver'd, not merely in a single Passage, but in many Places of those Epistles, in a manner that is sufficiently plain and obvious to Persons of an ordinary

dinary Understanding, that diligently read and search the Scriptures. There are some things in those Epistles more peculiarly relating to the Circumstances of those Times, and of the particular Churches to whom he writ, which are not so clear to us as they were to them to whom they were immediately directed. But there is also a great Variety of admirable Instructions of vast and universal use, and that serve for the Direction of Christians in all Ages. And the same Observation may be made with regard to other Parts of Scripture which the Author represents as difficult and obscure.

Upon the whole, let us grant that there are Obscurities and Difficulties in Scripture, which is all that his Instances prove; does this prove that no part of them is clear and plain? If some things be expressed in an *hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical* and *typical* way, (to use the Author's Phrases, p. 290*.) besides that the Scope and Design of them is often plain enough, and the Scripture itself frequently leads us to the just Explication of them, by comparing one part of it with another; does it follow, that even supposing there are Difficulties in some of those Passages, which we are not able to explain, that therefore other parts which are not so expressed, may not be signally useful for the Instruction of Mankind? The doctrinal and moral part of the sacred Writings is for the most part sufficiently clear and intelligible to an ordinary Capacity, that will bring an honest and attentive Mind; and it is the great Excellency of the Scripture, that there is no Precept or Doctrine of any consequence, but what is frequently repeated, and deliver'd in various ways, that it may be the better understood, and may make the stronger and deeper Impression.

Indeed if it be a sufficient Objection against the Clear-

* P. 262.

ness and Usefulness of a written Revelation, that there are some Things in it obscure and hard to be understood, the Objection will also hold against the Clearness and Usefulness of what the Author calls original or natural Revelation. He represents the Book of Nature as very plain, *written in Characters legible by the whole World*, p. 28*. Yet nothing is more certain, than that there are many things in the Book of Nature, or, to use the Author's darling Phrase, in the Nature and Reason of Things, hard to be understood and explain'd. There are many Phænomena in Nature, in the Frame of the Universe, in the Conduct of divine Providence, and in the present Constitution of Things, which the best and wisest Men in all Ages have found it very difficult to account for, and from which atheistical Men have taken advantage to expose and subvert the main Principles of natural Religion. Indeed it is foolish to suppose any Scheme of Things without Difficulties; but does this prove, that therefore nothing in Nature is clear and evident? There must be some Care and Attention used on every Supposition, by any Man that would attain to a right Knowledge of God and of his Duty; but I think it can scarce be denied, that with respect even to the Principles of natural Religion, it requires far less Attention and Abstraction in the generality of Mankind to understand them, and come to a Certainty about them as deliver'd in the sacred Writings, than if they were left to find them out for themselves, and argue them from the Reason and Nature of Things, which yet this Writer so often supposes to be visible to the whole World.

4thly, Another Principle that I would lay down, as what cannot justly be contested, is this; that we are to read the Scriptures and judge of their Sense with

* P. 24.

with the same Candor that we do other Writings, and that it is very unreasonable to insist upon such Things with regard to the Scriptures, as all the World would count perfectly absurd and unjust, if demanded with regard to any other Writings whatsoever. The Equity of this Rule is very evident, and if our Author had observed it in judging of the Sense of Scripture, it would have prevented many of his Objections, which are such that if applied to any other Book in the World, would be rejected with Contempt and Indignation. Thus, *e. g.* this Writer demands that the Words of Scripture be all taken in the literal Sense; no Allowance is to be made for any figurative Expressions. "A Revelation (says he) is useless if it be not taken literally, because Men in that case are as much govern'd by Reason, as if there were no Revelation at all." And again, that "were Men governed not by Reason, but by some external Revelation, [where, by the way, he unfairly opposes Men's being governed by Reason and by Revelation, as if these were inconsistent,] "they had nothing more to do but to take the Words of that Revelation in its literal, obvious, and plain meaning, how absurd soever it might appear to their carnal Reason, p. 201*."

But what should we think of a Critick that should advance this for a Rule in judging of the Writings of *Plato*, *Cicero*, or *Homer*, that every single Passage in their Writings is to be taken strictly according to the Letter, or else they are of no use to our Instruction at all? Would not this be to turn the finest Writings of Antiquity, and the most beautiful and noble Passages in those Writings into Nonsense and Absurdity? Indeed the World is so just, that in that case the Ridicule

* P. 178.

dicule would return upon the impotent Censurer, who would only prove his own Folly and want of Taste. And yet thus it is that our Author treats the Scriptures. He would have every metaphorical Expression in the whole Bible to be taken strictly according to the Letter, or else that the Revelation cannot answer any End at all. This can be owing to nothing but to a determined Resolution to expose the Scriptures at any rate, tho' he has only exposed himself in the Attempt: and it was certainly not very prudent to betray his Prejudices in a manner, that must needs create an ill Opinion of him and his Design in every intelligent Reader.

In order to make his Reflection pass the better, our Author is pleas'd to confound the *literal Sense*, and the *plain obvious Sense*; as in the Passage cited above, that we must *take the Words of the Revelation in its literal, obvious and plain Meaning*. And again, p. 206. he supposes that the Scriptures, if the *Words be taken in their plain literal Sense*, assert immoral or impious Doctrines, &c. But nothing can be more unfair than to confound the *literal Sense*, and the *plain obvious Meaning*, as if this were the same thing. The *literal Sense* (if by it he means that even the Figure, when any is made use of, must be taken literally) is often not the *plain obvious Sense*. David calls God his *Rock*, and talks of being *cover'd with his Feathers*, and *trusting in the Shadow of his Wings*. Can any Man be so senseless as to imagine that he intends to signify that God was a huge heap of Stone, or a winged Animal with large Feathers? And must we, if we be governed by Revelation, be obliged to take it so, or else be said to have no regard for the Revelation at all? In these and innumerable other Instances, the *strict literal Sense* is not the *plain obvious Sense*, tho' the Author artfully con-

founds

finds these. The meaning of the Expressions is plain and obvious, tho' the Expressions be figurative; and there needs no other Direction for understanding them than common Sense.

Our candid Author is pleased to mention some Passages of Scripture, where God is represented as *bisping* for the Nations, *Isa.* 5. 26. 7. 18. *Zach.* 10. 8. in all which Passages, the meaning is plain and obvious to any common Reader, that it signifies his calling them together for the purposes of his Providence. He also mentions that Passage in the Parable of *Jotham*, where *Wine is said to cheer God and Man*, *Judg.* 9. 13. I suppose out of his great Compassion for the People, he is afraid lest they should be mis-led by such Passages as these to imagine, that God is only a huge overgrown Serpent, or that he is a Drinker of Wine; and I wonder he did not also suspect that by the Parable last mention'd, the People should be induced to think that Trees could speak, which would have been as natural an Inference as the other. It would be honouring such Criticisms too much to return them a serious Answer. So when God is call'd a *Sun* and a *Shield*, a *consuming Fire*, a *Fountain of living Water*, a *Horn of Salvation*, a *high Tower*, &c. the Vulgar that read this, must certainly be in danger of thinking that he is literally all these. When the Valleys are said to *shout for joy and sing*; when the Sun is said to *know his going down*; that the *Waters saw God and fled*; that *Day unto Day uttereth Speech*; that the *Lightnings say unto God, here we are*, &c. what can common Readers suppose, but that the inanimate Creatures have Sense and Speech, and all the Organs necessary for that purpose? When they read those Words of *Job*, *when the Ear heard me, then it bless'd me*, what can they conclude, but that there is a Tongue in the Ear as well as in the

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the Mouth? And they must think that Blood has an articulate Voice, when they read of *Blood crying unto God*, and of the *Blood of Abel speaking*. But in good earnest, does this Writer think the common People are such very stupid ignorant Creatures, that they can't understand such Expressions as these? How will they then be able to understand abstracted Reasonings, or to work out for themselves a System of Doctrines and Morals by the mere force of their own Judgment from the Reason and Nature of Things, which yet is a Work that our Author thinks the meanest of them all well qualified for?

But he asks, "If the use of Language is perverted in some Instances, how can we be certain but it may be in others? p. 332*. That is, if there be some Expressions that are figurative, how do we know when they are to be taken literally? He thinks therefore *there ought to be certain Marks, to tell us when the Words of Scripture are to be taken literally and when figuratively, or what is the figurative Sense; or else Men in these Points are as much to be determined by their Reason, as if there was no such Book*, p. 206, 207†. What *Marks* does he mean? Does he think it necessary, that at the end of every Sentence something should be added to inform the Reader, that this is a Figure, or this is to be taken literally? which wou'd certainly be to render it the most ridiculous Book in the World, and would furnish a plentiful Fund of Raillery to the Gentlemen that now demand it. The Bible supposes Persons to have common Sense, and to bring with them common Attention, without which they would be incapable of understanding any Book or Writing whatsoever. And this is for the most part sufficient to enable them to distinguish Expressions that are figurative and metaphorical from those

that are not so. And the Meaning of a figurative Expression is often as plain and obvious even to a common Capacity, as if it were express'd without any Figure at all. But if he means by *Marks*, sufficient Directions for preventing any Mistakes of consequence that might arise from the misunderstanding figurative Expressions, 'tis certain there are such Marks in Scripture. As when we read of God's *Arm*, *Eye*, &c. and are in other Passages expressly told that *God is a Spirit*, that he is *invisible*, that he *fills Heaven and Earth*, that *there is no Likeness to be compared unto him*, nor is he to be represented by any corporeal *Image*, or *the Similitude of any thing that is in Heaven or Earth*; 'tis plain and obvious even to those of the meanest Capacity, that will diligently read the Scriptures, and compare one Part of it with another, that the *Arm* is only a metaphorical Expression to signify his *Power*, the *Eye* to signify his *Knowledge*, and so of the rest.

I can't help taking notice on this occasion of a Passage, p. 201*. where he makes his pretended Christian Dialogist B. say, "We may take the
 " Words of fallible Men in the plain literal Sense,
 " but if any thing is said by infallible Men, which
 " in the obvious Meaning of the Words is incon-
 " sistent with Reason, we must have recourse to
 " an allegorical Sense; or if that will not do, we
 " must put no Meaning at all on the Words: thus
 " we support the Dignity of both Revelation and
 " Reason."

The Author takes little care to preserve the Character of his Dialogists. He introduces B. as a Christian, and yet makes him talk as no Christian would; as if the only way to preserve the Dignity of Revelation, was to turn the Scripture into Allegory, or to suppose it to have no Mean-
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* P. 178.

ing at all ; or as if the Scripture stood in need of extraordinary Allowances, and of putting a manifest Constraint upon it, to preserve it from Absurdity. *We may*, says he, *take the Words of fallible Men in the plain literal Sense.* But if he means, that in judging of the Sense of their Writings, we must take every Expression strictly according to the Letter, without ever making any Allowance for metaphorical and figurative Expressions, it is absolutely false. At this rate the noblest Writings in the World, and which have been justly admired in all Ages, might be made to appear the most absurd and ridiculous. And why then should this be thought a reasonable Proceeding in judging of Scripture ? All that we desire is only that the same Candor be used in judging of this, which is used in judging of the Sense of any other Book.

There are some Things thought reasonable with respect to all other Books in the World; we make the same Demands in favour of the Scripture. Such as, 1. That the Readers have common Sense. The Scripture, no more than any other Book, was not written for natural Fools and Idiots. It supposes Men reasonable Creatures, that they are capable of understanding what is said to them, or written before them. Men must use their Reason in judging of the Sense of Scripture, and of all Writings in the World; but it does not follow, that because Men must use their Reason in order to apprehend the Sense of Scripture and all other Books, that therefore neither the Scripture nor any other Books can instruct us in any thing but what we knew, or might as well have known of our selves before ; which yet seems to be the Course of this Writer's arguing.

2. Another Thing necessary to our reading the Scripture or any other Book with profit is, that

we come to it with honest and candid Minds, willing to be inform'd, and not with a determinate Design to pervert and distort it; for there is no Book in the World but may be expos'd and turn'd into Ridicule, if Men set themselves to read it with a design only to find fault.

3. If we would read the Scripture or any other valuable Book with Advantage, we must read it with Attention and Care. Supposing an external Revelation given, God may justly expect and require that Men should seriously weigh and consider it, especially as it relates to Matters of such great consequence, and on which their own Interest and Happiness so much depends. It is no Reflection on the Scripture to say, it was not design'd for the Benefit of the Slothful and Negligent, or those that would be at no pains at all to understand it. And such a Degree of Attention as Men usually bestow on any thing which they are really desirous to know, will be sufficient to lead Men into a right understanding of it.

4. That Men must not judge of the Sense of Scripture merely by any one Passage taken singly and separately from the rest, but that they should compare one part of Scripture with another; and that if what is more obscurely expressed in one place is more clearly expressed in another, the former should be interpreted by the latter. Let the Scripture be tried by these Rules, the Equity of which is acknowledged by all the World in every Case, and we desire no more.





C H A P. VIII.

Concerning the Keys of Solution which our Author pretends are necessary for understanding the Scriptures, and which the Vulgar are wholly unacquainted with. That many of the Difficulties he mentions are common to all Writings in the World; that others of them are such as a common Reader may understand, that carefully compares the Scripture with it self. The Author's Argument for the Obscurity of the Scriptures, from the Parables and proverbial Expressions made use of by our Saviour, consider'd.

THE Author, in order to shew the Obscurity of the sacred Writings, makes a great stir about the *Keys of Solution*, as he calls them, which are necessary to a right understanding of the Scripture. These he represents as mighty Difficulties, Things which *the Learned have frequent recourse to*, but which *the Unlearned are wholly unacquainted with*; see p. 236, 237 *. And yet many of these are of such a nature as are common to all Writings whatsoever. Thus he reckons amongst those *Keys of Solution* which the Unlearned are wholly unacquainted with, *Consideration of the Matter in hand, Interrogation, Parenthesis, the Scope of the Author, what goes before and what follows, the Circumstances of the Subject*. And are not these to be consider'd in every Book and Writing in the World? Is not every Man that reads a Book to consider *the Matter in hand, the Scope of*

* P. 213, 214.

the Author, what goes before and follows, &c. And if the Unlearned are incapable of judging of these things, they are incapable of understanding any Book or Writing whatsoever.

What an inconsistent Writer is this? He supposes the Vulgar to have such a Share of natural Sense and Judgment, that they can easily by the Force of their own Reason, without any Assistance, form for themselves a right Scheme of Religion, and of the Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature in their just Extent, which have exercised the greatest Philosophers and wisest Men in all Ages; and yet at the same time he represents them as so very silly, so destitute of common Sense, that they are incapable to judge of the Meaning of any Book, or the Scope of any Author.

Amongst the Difficulties of Scripture, this Gentleman also mentions *Tropes, Metonymies, Ironies, Hyperboles, Proprieties and Improperities of Language*, in a Passage cited from Bishop Tailour, p. 238 *. I wonder he did not think proper, when his hand was in, to give us all the Names of the Figures mention'd by the Rhetoricians, *Enallage, Pleonasmus, Meiosis*, and a great number of other hard Names, which every Rhetorick-book would have furnish'd him with. These would have made a formidable Appearance; and then he might have ask'd, *Are not the Unlearned wholly unacquainted with these Keys of Solution?* And it is very probable that most of them don't know the Meaning of these hard Terms, and yet they find no difficulty in understanding the Forms of Expression signified by them, without the Help of the Rhetorician. The Vulgar themselves daily fall into the use of many of these Figures, without knowing what to call them; and if these Things be supposed to transcend their Understanding, it would prove not only

* P. 214.

only that they cannot understand any Book whatsoever, ancient or modern, but that they cannot understand one another, even in common Conversation, since there is no Language in any Nation without many Instances of this kind.

Other things which our Author mentions amongst his *Keys of Solution*, are common to all ancient Authors, as *various Readings, Transpositions of Words or Clauses, Errors of Copies, various Meanings of the same Word, Punctuation, Allusion to Customs, compendious Expressions, Phraseology of that Time, the Author's Nation or native Country.* All these are to be consider'd, and frequently occur in all the Writings of the Ancients, (and many of them in all Writings whatsoever) and if these do not hinder but that the Learned may very well understand them, and that the Unlearned may do so too when translated, and receive signal Advantage from perusing them, (as all the World owns) why should this be urged against the Scriptures, as rendering the sacred Writings unintelligible or useless?

But perhaps the other Difficulties he mentions amongst his *Keys of Solutions*, are such as are peculiar to the Scriptures; such as *the Barrenness of the Hebrew Tongue, and consequently its Ambiguity, its particular Idioms, the various Senses of the same Verb in different Conjugations, the Want of certain ways of Expression used in other Tongues, the Imitation of the Hebrew Idiom in the LXX Version, and in the original Text of the New Testament, Greek of the Synagogue.* But has not every Language its particular Idioms, various Senses of the same Verb, want of certain ways of Expression used in other Tongues? Suppose a Man should take it into his Head to prove, that no Book in the *Greek Tongue* could be understood or translated at all, on account of its various Dialects, *Attick, Ionick, Æolick, &c.* the various Significations of the same Verb in differ-

rent Conjugations, its peculiar Tenses, Aorists, &c., would he be able to persuade any Man of Sense, either that the Learned could not certainly understand the Meaning of any *Greek* Book whatsoever, or that the Unlearned could not understand or read with any Certainty or Benefit any Book translated out of that Language? or would not such a forward Caviller be exploded for his Ignorance or Impertinence? And yet this is the Method our Author takes to shew, that we cannot be certain of the Meaning of the Scriptures. 'Tis very well known that most of these Difficulties are easily overcome by the Industry of the Learned; and the Vulgar enjoy the Benefit of their Industry in the Translations; nor is there any Translation in which many of these Difficulties are not taken off their hands. If the *Hebrew* Idioms are translated into the *Greek* of the New Testament, so they may into the *English* Language too, and that with great Beauty and Elegance, as Mr. *Addison* observes; and these ways of speaking are for the most part easily understood by the Vulgar, though perhaps without being inform'd of it, they could not tell whether they were originally *Hebraisms* or not.

As to the *sublime and metaphorical Expressions* most frequent in the oriental Languages, this has been already consider'd; but when he also mentions *the Want of Exactness in the sacred Writers*, if he means that they do not always observe the Laws of a strict Method, either in relating Facts in the exact Order of Time, or in proposing Doctrines in a regular systematical way, let him first prove that it was necessary they should do so; or that no Book can be useful or intelligible, but what is written in an exact artificial Method. The Facts related in Scripture, are for the most part understood as well as if they were exactly related (as they very often are) in the very Order of Time in which they hap-

happen'd. And the Doctrines and Precepts there deliver'd are more useful to the Vulgar, more accommodated to their Capacities, when propos'd in a simple familiar way, frequently inculcated and repeated on all occasions in different Parts of the sacred Writings, as they manifestly are, than if deliver'd once for all in a formal System.

Amongst his *Keys of Solution*, he further mentions the *Prudence* of the sacred Writers in *concealing some Things*, or in *complying with some Opinions prevailing in their Times*; *Condescension to Pagans or Jews*; *using such Ideas as prevail'd in such a Religion*.

If they conceal'd some things for a Season in Prudence, because it was not as yet a proper time for the Discovery, as our Saviour himself conceal'd some things from his Disciples till after his Resurrection, they are elsewhere clearly reveal'd. And we have now the Advantage of that clearer Discovery. If they comply'd with *some Opinions or Practices prevailing in their Times*, it is easy to distinguish between what they did in a way of Condescension to the *Jews*, Instances of which we have in the Apostle *Paul*, and what they deliver'd as Laws obligatory on all Christians in general; nor did they ever deliver any false Opinions for true in condescension to the Prejudices either of *Jews* or *Pagans*. If they made use of such *Ideas as prevail'd in such a Religion*, by which I suppose he means their talking of things under the New Testament in Terms borrow'd from the Old, it is easy for a common Reader that is acquainted with the Scriptures, and compares the Old Testament with the New, to know the Design of such Expressions; as when the Gospel-Church is sometimes call'd *Israel*, the *Jerusalem which is above*, when Prayer and Praise and good Works are called *Sacrifices*, &c.

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The Author adds to these, *Answers suitable to the Needs of the Hearers, rather than to their Queries*: And if their Queries were curious or impertinent and improper, where is the Fault of answering in such a manner as was best suited to the *Needs of the Hearers*? and why may not such Answers be supposed most *suitable to the Needs of the Readers* too? *Precepts peculiar to the Apostles*. These are but few, and for the most part easily distinguish'd by Men of ordinary Capacities, that will read the Bible with Care and Attention. *Advices to Perfection*; if he means by this, *Counsels of Perfection* in the Popish Notion, as distinguish'd from *Commands*, I deny there are any such in Scripture; but if he only means such occasional Injunctions as are not equally obligatory on all, these are easily distinguish'd: such as the Command to the young Man in the Gospel *to sell all that he had*; there needs no great Penetration to discern that this was a peculiar Case, and not a standing Law equally obliging all Christians at all times. But this Instance shall be consider'd afterwards. *Censures against certain Hereticks*: And is it not plain to the commonest Readers that these are Censures? What though they do not know the Names of those Hereticks, whether they were *Gnosticks*, or the Followers of *Simon Magus*, or false Judaizing Teachers? It is enough that they may easily know by the reading of such Passages, that there are Censures pass'd upon Persons who are describ'd by certain Characters, which may warn them against all such to whom these Characters in any Age belong.

Many other things which this Writer mentions afterwards as great Difficulties in Scripture, p. 335, 336*. are such as are very usual in all Books, and for understanding which there needs no more than common

common Sense and common Attention, and a comparing the Scripture with itself. Thus he observes, that *Things spoken in a general unlimited Sense, are to be understood in a restrained Sense.* And what more common in all Writings than Instances of this kind? For all Writings suppose the Readers to have common Sense, and that this may in many cases direct them to limit the general Expressions. But especially there is no just Occasion of Complaint, if there be other Passages in those very Writings, that plainly direct the Readers to the Limitation.

Thus it is in the Instances produced by the Author under this Head. *e. g.* When we are commanded to *swear not at all*, Mat. 5. 34. besides that the very Words themselves seem plainly to direct us to understand it of swearing in common Conversation, since our Saviour immediately adds, *but let your Conversation be yea, yea, nay, nay, &c.* besides this, I say, when we find our blessed Saviour himself answering upon Oath before a Magistrate, as he did when the High-Priest *adjured him by the living God, to tell, whether* he were the *Christ the Son of God*, which was charging him to declare it upon Oath, and was the usual Form of administering an Oath by the Magistrate among the *Jews*; when we consider that the Apostle *Paul* on some solemn Occasions confirm'd the Truth of what he was asserting by an Oath; and that it is expressly declar'd, that *an Oath for Confirmation is among Men an End of all Strife*, Heb. 6. 16. These things lead us so to limit that general Command, as not to exclude all swearing, when call'd to do it before a Magistrate, and when the Importance of the Occasion makes it proper to do so. When *Children* and *Servants* are commanded to *obey their Parents and Masters in all things*, Eph. 6. 1, 5. no Man of common Sense that reads the Scripture, can under-
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stand it of obeying them in any thing that is wicked and immoral, or contrary to the Rules of Justice and Equity, Truth and Charity; since it appears from the whole Strain of Scripture, that we are not to do any thing of this kind in Obedience to any Command of Men, or to any Authority upon Earth. And it is there laid down as a perpetual Rule, that *it is better to obey God than Man*. When our Saviour tells his Disciples and the Multitude, *whatsoever the Scribes and Pharisees bid you observe, that observe and do*, Matt. 23. 3. 'tis evident this cannot be understood of receiving all they taught without Examination, but only of observing what they taught out of the Word of God, and agreeably to it, (as they *sat in Moses's Seat*, v. 2.) for he himself expressly warns his Disciples *to beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees*, which is interpreted to be their *Doctrines*, Matt. 16. 11, 12. and accuses them of *teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men*, and justifies his Disciples for transgressing their Traditions, Matt. 15. 2, 3, 9. When he tells his Disciples, that *whatsoever they should ask in his Name, he would do it*, John 14. 13. Matt. 18. 19. the Scripture it self, as well as common Sense, leads us to understand it of Things lawful, and as far as infinite Wisdom sees proper. For *this is the Confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his Will he heareth us*, 1 John 5. 13, 14. No Man that reads the Scripture can think that that Precept mentioned by the Author, *Pray without ceasing*, signifies that we should do nothing else but pray, since there is a great variety of other Duties expressly required and enjoined there. When *St. John's little Children* are said to *have an Unction and to know all Things*, 1 John 2. 20. no common Reader that is acquainted with the Scripture can understand it in an absolute unlimited Sense, since the knowing all Things

is there every where represented as the peculiar Prerogative of God himself, and the Attainments of the best of Men here on Earth in Knowledge as well as Holiness are represented as very imperfect; and therefore it can only signify their being inlightened in the Knowledge of all Things necessary for them to know. In this Sense also may that other Passage be understood which our Author mentions, 1 Cor. 2. 15. where *the spiritual Man* is said to *judge all Things*; which, adds he, *the Papists say is the Pope*. But the Text it self rather proves that any good Man under the Conduct of the divine Spirit, is able to discern and judge *all Things* necessary for Faith and Practice. When our Saviour saith to *Peter*, *Whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven*, Matt. 16. 19. and elsewhere gives all his Apostles the same Power, John 20. 23. the natural Sense obvious to any Man that carefully consults the Scriptures, and takes his Notions from thence, is, that it contains a Promise of an infallible Guidance to the Apostles in the Execution of their Office, but which no others since can justly lay claim to in the same Extent.

This Writer observes it as another difficulty in Scripture, that *Things are absolutely condemn'd, which are only so conditionally*. He instances in Isa. 1. 13. where the Jewish Rites and Sacrifices are represented as an *Iniquity*, and an *Abomination to the Lord*. But the Passage it self, which is one of the noblest that can be any where found, plainly directs every common Reader to the true Interpretation; which is, that the reason why God rejected their Services, was because their Hands were full of Blood, Rapine, Injustice and Violence. It is plainly design'd to take the *Jews* off from a too great Dependance on mere ritual Observances, and to let them know that these were not the principal Things God requir'd, and were of small Value

lue compared with the moral Precepts, and when separated from the Observation of these would be of no avail to their Acceptance with God. This also is the plain Design of the other Passage which this Author produces from *Jer. 7. 22.* where God saith to the Jews, *I spake not to your Fathers, nor commanded them in that Day I brought them out of the Land of Egypt concerning Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my Voice, and I will be your God, &c.* Our Author, with what Candor I leave the Reader to judge, in citing this Passage omits the last Clause, by which it would have appear'd, that the Design of it was not to deny that God commanded Sacrifices to the Jews at all (nor can any Man that reads the Scriptures think so) but to signify that this was not what he principally required, but rather Obedience to the moral Precepts of the Law. Thus, *Hos. 6. 6. I have desired Mercy and not Sacrifice, and the Knowledge of God more than Burnt-offering*; where the latter Clause clearly explains the former. There are several Passages of this nature in the Old Testament, the Design of which is obvious and excellent, and such as does Honour to the sacred Writings.

Our Author is pleas'd also to mention some hyperbolical Expressions that occur in Scripture, such as *2 Chron. 9. 23. that all the Kings of the Earth sought the Presence of Solomon.* And that, *if all the Things which Jesus did were written, the World it self could not contain the Books, John 21. 25.* But tho' the Expressions are hyperbolical, many Instances of which are to be met with in all Languages, the general Intention of them is too obvious to mislead any common Reader. And when our Saviour tells his Disciples, that by Faith they should be able to *remove Mountains and pluck up Sycamine-trees, Matt. 17. 20. Luke 17. 6.* not to
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urge that the Expressions were proverbial, and familiar to the *Jews* to whom our Saviour spoke, as Dr. *Lightfoot* has shewn; the general Scope of them is plain to the unlearned Reader, which is to shew that by their Faith they should be able to surmount the greatest Difficulties; as it actually came to pass, when by Faith in the Name of Jesus they wrought the most astonishing Miracles.

That Phrase of our Saviour, of *eating his Flesh* and *drinking his Blood*, which this Gentleman also mentions, admits of an easy Interpretation to those of ordinary Capacities, that govern themselves by the sacred Writings; since it is evident from several Passages in that very Discourse of which this is a Part, that it was never intended to be taken in a gross carnal Sense; and our Saviour himself, his own best Interpreter, plainly tells us so, v. 63. *The Flesh profiteth nothing, the Words which I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life.* The same may be said with respect to those Words, *This is my Body*; for besides that it is a common thing in all Languages to call the Sign by the Name of the Thing signified, the Scripture it self plainly directs us in this very Instance to the true Interpretation, both by calling it Bread after the Consecration, and by the Clause immediately added, *Do this in Remembrance of me*; and by the Words which follow with relation to the Cup, and which it is impossible to understand in any other than a figurative Sense, *This Cup is the New Testament in my Blood.*

When Jesus declares in a Passage cited by the Author, *Luke 14. 26. If any Man hate not his Father and Mother, &c. he cannot be my Disciple*; no common Reader can think, that our Saviour who commands us to love our Enemies, would have us absolutely hate our Parents. It is evidently only an emphatical way of Expression, to signify

fy that we must be ready to forsake Father and Mother and all that is near and dear to us on Earth, when the Cause of God and Religion requires it. Accordingly what is express'd here by *hating* Father and Mother, is elsewhere express'd by *forsaking* them, *Matt.* 19. 29. and the Thing that is here forbidden is not a loving our Parents, but a *loving* them *more than* Christ, for so it is clearly explain'd in that parallel Passage, *Matt.* 10. 37.

Our Author asks, p. 336*. "What can be more surprizing, than Christ's declaring in most express Terms, that he came to do that which we must suppose he came to hinder; as that he came not to *send Peace but a Sword*, and *Division*, to *set Men at variance*, and to *send Fire on Earth*, &c. *Matt.* 10. 34. *Luke* 12. 49, 51." But neither is there any Difficulty in this. No Man of a common Understanding, that seriously reads the Scripture, and considers the whole of our Saviour's Life and Conduct, can possibly suppose that it was his Intention and the natural Tendency of his Gospel to embroil the World, or to make use of the Methods of Arms and Violence, (which he expressly disclaims and forbids.) 'Tis evident to the last degree, that he only declares what would by Accident, through the perverse Opposition of Men, be the Consequence of introducing the most benevolent Institution that ever was. Nor is there any thing *surprizing* in this Passage, but the strange Corruption of Mankind in rising up with bloody Rage and Violence against a Religion, so calculated to promote the Peace and Happiness of the World; and in turning that into an Engine of Strife and Contention, which where it is sincerely believed and embraced has the greatest Tendency to form Men to a kind and benevolent Temper.

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This Gentleman mentions it as a Difficulty in Scripture, that *Advice* (I suppose he means a yielding to Advice; or being governed by Advice) is called *Submission*, *Subjection*, and *Obedience*, 1 Pet. 5. 5. Hebr. 13. 17. A way of speaking very usual in the best Writings, and even in common Conversation: And that *Persuasion* is called *Compulsion*, as in that Text, Luke 14. 23. *Compel* them to come in: And what is more familiar even in our own Language, than to talk of a Man's being *constrained* by the *Force* of Reason and Argument, or by the *Power* of Persuasion? And if the *Papists* (as our Author has it) *have made such rooting Work from this and other misapplied Places*, such as Matt. 15. 13. it only shews, that the plainest Things in the World may be abused and perverted. And since he owns these Texts are *misapplied*, why should the Scriptures be blam'd for it, and not rather their Perverseness accused, who interpret them in a Sense quite contrary to their obvious Meaning, and to the intire Strain and Tenor of the New Testament?

These and other Forms of Speech, which the Author represents as Difficulties and Obscurities in Scripture above the reach of the Vulgar, are usual in all Books and Languages; and easily understood by those that have common Sense, and bring with them common Attention. And even with respect to those Idioms or Forms of Speech, which were more peculiar to the Languages and Times in which the Scriptures were written, the Design of them is for the most part obvious enough to any that considers what goes before and follows after, and compares the Scripture with it self. Every Language in the World, and almost every Age, has some peculiar Ways of Expression not so common in other Languages or in other Ages, and yet this does not hinder but that Books writ-

ten in that Language or in that Age may be easily understood, and the Design and Intention of those Phrases and Idioms is generally plain enough to every attentive Reader, even of an ordinary Capacity.

The Author seems to lay a particular Stress upon the Parables and proverbial Sayings made use of by our Saviour, to shew that the New Testament is obscure, and above the reach of the common People. I shall therefore consider what he offers on each of these Heads.

'Tis certain that some of the most admired Passages in the Writings of Antiquity, are delivered in what the Author calls a *Parabolical* and *Allegorical* Way; as the Fable of *Prodicus*, the Table of *Cebes*, and many in the Writings of *Plato*, which have been ever thought, as they really are, beautiful and instructive, conveying in the most agreeable manner a noble Moral. That fine Writer Mr. *Addison* has produced some admirable Instances of this kind out of the Ancients, and added some of his own in imitation of them; and I dare say that among his numerous Readers, few can be found so stupid as not easily to apprehend the Meaning of them. And the Parables in the Gospel are for the most part so clear and obvious, that they can scarce create any Difficulty to the commonest Understanding; and they convey Instruction in so agreeable and so lively a manner, that I dare say none that have any Taste would wish them out of the sacred Writings, but rather think it a great Advantage that they are there.

But after all, it is far from being true what our Author alledges, p. 332 *. that *the New Testament is full of Parables*. There is scarce a Parable in the Epistles and Acts, which make up the greatest part of the New Testament. But he urges, *Is it not*

* P. 301.

not said, that without a Parable Jesus spake not to the Multitude, Matt. 13. 34. and for this remarkable Reason, that *seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand, &c.* Mark 4. 12. But when it is said, that *Jesus spake not to the Multitude without a Parable*, it cannot be understood as if he never spake any other way to the Multitude, as our Author insinuates; for the contrary is evident from the Account given in the Gospels of our Saviour's Discourses to the People; but it relates to a particular Time and Occasion; and the Parables he there delivers relate to the *Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven*, or the Gospel-dispensation, the Nature, Progress, and Success of it, which it was not yet Time fully to unfold.

As to the Reason which the Author thinks so remarkable, why our Saviour spoke to the People in Parables, that *seeing they might see and not perceive, &c.* this is express'd in Matt. 13. 13, &c. thus, *Therefore speak I unto them in Parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand*; that is, through their Hardness of Heart, and obstinate Prejudices, they were unfit to have those Things clearly explained to them, and were indisposed for receiving them at present. So that what was said concerning the *Jews in Isaiab's Time*, was remarkably verified in them, that *seeing they saw not, &c.* But though our Saviour design'd, for some special Reasons, not to let the People at that time into the Design of those Parables relating to the Nature, Design and Progress of his Kingdom, Mark 4. 11. and only explained them privately to his Disciples; yet 'tis certain that he did not design that his Disciples should keep those things to themselves, but should clearly publish them at a more convenient Season; as he tells them soon after, Mark 4. 22.

There is nothing hid that shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret but that it should come abroad. And what I tell you in Darkness, that speak ye in Light; and what ye hear in the Ear, that preach ye upon the House-tops. This accordingly they have done to our great Benefit, in Writings published for the common Use. And how then can those Parables be brought to prove the Obscurity of the Scriptures, which we have explained in those Scriptures? Nor is it any Objection against our Saviour's own Ministry whilst on Earth, that he delivered those Things more darkly to the People, which he intended and well knew should be more fully explained afterwards, and declared to the World in Writings designed for the common Benefit. This only shews that he perfectly knew the Times and the Seasons, and did not give all his Instructions at once, but as the People were able to bear them; and reserved many Things till after his Resurrection, when the Evidence should be compleated, and the People better prepared to receive and understand what should be told them concerning his Kingdom.

Though therefore it should be allowed what this Writer alledges, that *St. John's Gospel is for the most part written after an obscure allegorical manner, especially in relation to the Person of Christ*, p. 332*. it would only follow, that our Saviour in his own Discourses whilst on Earth (of which *St. John's Gospel* chiefly consists) did not so clearly discover his own Person and Offices and Messiahship to the Jews; the Time not being yet come for the full Manifestation of these Things, which was reserv'd till after his Resurrection, when these Things were to be clearly published to the World. As is evident from what he himself saith to his own Disciples, *John* 16. 13, 25.

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This Writer finds fault not only with the Parables of our Saviour, but with the proverbial Speeches, he makes use of. He mentions it to the disadvantage of Scripture among the *Keys of Solution*, which the Unlearned are wholly unacquainted with, that there are *compendious ways of Expression*. And did any one ever before this Author make it an Objection against the Writings of the Ancients, that there are Apophthegms to be found there; wise Sayings, short and full of admirable Sense, the general Design of which is easily understood, tho' no body pretends to take them in the utmost Strictness? The Usefulness of such moral Aphorisms was never doubted of, and such a way of speaking commonly strikes more, and is more easily remembred, than if express'd in the common Way.

He tells us, that the moral Precepts of our Saviour are express'd *obscurely*, and *generally speaking are not to be taken in their obvious and literal Meaning*. He instances in several of those Aphorisms which our Lord delivers in his Sermon on the Mount, p. 338, 339*. I must own I can't help having a very mean opinion of this Gentleman's Taste, who instead of admiring, as the best Judges have always done, that Discourse of our Saviour, which with an admirable sententious Brevity comprehends a great Variety of the most excellent moral Instructions, does all he can to turn it into Ridicule, or to represent it as useless and obscure. 'Tis not to be wondered at, that in a Discourse particularly address'd to the *Jews*, and designed to rectify the false Notions they had entertain'd of some important Duties of Morality, Christ should make use of some Forms of Expression, which tho' well known and familiar to them are not so clear to us. This affords a Proof of the Genuineness of those Discourses, that they bear the Cha-

ractions of that Nation and Age, and were particularly accommodated to that way of delivering moral Precepts, that was most admir'd amongst them; but yet they are not so accommodated to the peculiar manner of the *Jews*, as not to be of signal use in all Ages and Nations. And it is certain, that never was Morality carried to a sublimer Pitch, or represented in a more beautiful and comprehensive manner. And though some particular Expressions or Phrases may not be so easy to us, yet the general Design and Scope of them is obvious even at this Distance to Persons of an ordinary Capacity, and affords very excellent Instructions that may be of great use to direct us in our Conduct.

Thus as to the Precept the Author instances in, *Lend, hoping for nothing again*, Luke 6. 35. the general Design of this is plain and noble; that where we have Ability to do it, and the Necessity of our Neighbours requires it, we should lend even where we do not expect a Return, and they cannot recompense our Kindness. *If any Man will sue thee at Law, and take away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak also.* The Design of this is plain to a common Reader, that in many cases it is better to lose a Man's Right in smaller Instances, than to prosecute in Judgment or go to Law for every slight Matter. Human Laws must vindicate Wrongs, but many Cases may happen in which it is scarce consistent with the Equity and Patience of a good Man to do all that the Law of the Land allows him to do, or to be ready on every occasion to revenge every slight Injury, and carry it to the utmost Rigour of the Law. Thus *Cicero*, in his second Book of Offices, praises the Man who *abstains from Law as much as he can, or even a little more than is proper.*

To the same purpose when our Saviour saith, *Resist not Evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on the right*

right Cheek, turn to him the other also, Matth. 5. 29. The evident Design of this Precept is, to correct that Proneness to Revenge and Retaliation of Injuries to which the *Jews* were addicted, and which indeed all Men are too apt to indulge. The *Jews* took advantage to encourage themselves in this from that Constitution in the Law of *Moses*, mention'd ver. 38. that there should be render'd *an Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth.* This Law was of a political or judicial Nature, relating to them as a Commonwealth. It directed the Magistrates what they were to do, if applied to for punishing Injuries; but it was never design'd to oblige private Persons to insist upon a strict Retaliation. And indeed in many Cases it is very just in the Magistrate to punish Injuries with Severity, where it is very wrong in private Persons to prosecute them according to the Law, or to take advantage of it for gratifying their own Revenge. Our Saviour therefore, to correct that vindictive Spirit, here instructs us, that it is better when we have received a slight Wrong or Injury, to bear another, than with a revengeful Mind to prosecute every Affront, and insist on a strict Retaliation. And if the Design of these Precepts of our Lord was generally observed, how easy and happy would the World be! But nothing that he here offers is design'd to prohibit Self-defence in important Cases, which is a quite different thing from Retaliation of Injuries, or rendring Evil for Evil. The Injuries he mentions are of the smaller kind, such as do Men no great hurt, and yet such as they are apt deeply to resent. *Grotius* in *Matth. 5. 39.* produces several Passages out of celebrated Heathen Authors, that have in effect said the same thing our Saviour here advises to. It is a Maxim of *Plato*, in his *Crito*, that a *Man when provok'd by an Injury ought not to retaliate it, whatsoever he suffers.*

suffers. And *Maximus Tyrius* has a whole Dissertation in vindication of that Maxim of *Plato*, and asserts, that *he that revenges an Injury is more unjust than he that first offer'd it.* *Lyfias* condemns those who instead of pardoning those that had injur'd them, prosecuted them at Law before the Magistrates. *Celsus* himself, that bitter Enemy to Christianity, is more candid than our Author; for, mentioning those very Passages of our Saviour which this Writer finds fault with, he does not censure them as absurd and apt to mislead the Vulgar. He owns their Excellency and Usefulness, but pretends that *Plato* had said the same thing before him in a finer manner; that the Precepts of Jesus were *more rustically* express'd, ἀγχιώτερον, that is, not so politely and elegantly. See *Origen cont. Cels.* lib. 7. p. 370.

When our Saviour saith, *Give to every Man that asketh of thee*, Luke 6. 30. 'tis manifest that the Meaning cannot be, that we are to give to every one that asketh us, whether he wants it or not, or whether we are able to give it or not. Nor is there any danger that any Man of common Capacity that reads the Scripture should understand it so. But the Design of the Precept obvious to every Reader is plainly this, that where we have Ability to do it, and the Necessities of our Neighbour require it, we should be ready to lend or give, even where we do not expect a Return; and that we are not to confine our Charity to those of our own Sect or Nation, as the *Jews* were too apt to do. And as this Precept is evidently design'd to ingage us to an extensive Charity, and readiness to distribute, so the following Words of *him who takes thy Goods ask them not again*, or do not require or exact them, as the Word ἀπαίτειν signifies, are manifestly intended to signify, that even in Matters of just Debt, and where we have a legal Demand upon Persons

Persons for our own Goods, which they have had from us, and for which they are become indebted (for of such our Saviour is here speaking, and not of Thieves and Robbers that take away our Goods by Violence) we are not always to urge our Right to the utmost; but in many cases to remit the Demand we might justly have upon them, where the rigorous exacting it might tend to their great Hurt and Ruin, and where we are able to bear the Loss. And any one that considers how many cruel things are done under pretence of Law and Justice, and of recovering a Man's own, will think there was great need to caution Persons against such a Conduct, and that these Precepts of our Saviour are far from being needless or useless. They are indeed express'd in a general way, according to the Nature of such short Aphorisms, which seldom descend to the particular Limitations; but in all such Cases, Men easily make Limitations for themselves, though not expressly mention'd. Nor is there much Danger that Men should err in these Matters on the charitable side, as our Blessed Saviour, who had a perfect Knowledge of human Nature, well saw.

Our Author thinks, that "without having recourse to the Reason of Things we should be apt to think, that the Poor, as such, were the only Favourites of Heaven; for which he cites Luke 6. 20, 21. *Blessed be ye Poor, blessed be ye that hunger*; and that the Gospel was an Enemy to the Rich as such, because it is said, *Wo unto you Rich, &c.* Luke 6. 24. and *it is easier for a Camel to pass through the Eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God*, Luke 18. 25." But certainly there needs no recourse to I don't know what abstracted Reason of Things, to find out the true Meaning of these Passages, there needs no more than common Sense,

Sense, and a comparing the Scripture with itself. For besides that the Poor that are pronounced blessed, are expressly declar'd to be the *Poor in Spirit*, which every body that is acquainted with the Scripture knows to be the *Humble*, Matth. 5. 3. and those that *hunger* are explain'd to be such as *hunger and thirst after Righteousness*, Matth. 5. 6. and the Rich that are there condemn'd, are explain'd to be such as put their *trust in Riches*, Mark 10. 24. and that *lay up Treasures for themselves, but are not rich towards God*, Luke 12. 21. besides this, I say, 'tis not possible for any Man that reads and considers the sacred Writings, and takes his Notions from thence, to think that either Riches or Poverty alone consider'd, will render any Man acceptable or unacceptable to the Deity; since nothing is more evident from the whole Scripture, than that without Holiness no Man can hope for Happiness, and that in whomsoever this is found, he shall certainly be saved whether he be rich or poor. And particularly *the rich in this World* that are also *rich in good Works*, are represented as *laying up in store a good Foundation for themselves against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal Life*, 1 Tim. 6. 19.

'Tis a further Specimen of this Author's Candor, that with a design I suppose to shew that the Scriptures ought not to be admitted in a trading Nation, he insinuates that the *Gospel is an Enemy to all those Methods which make a Nation rich*, p. 339. That for this reason *that no Man might be rich, it was a general Precept, Sell what ye have and give Alms*, Luke 12. 33. That with the same view the *poor Widow* is commended for her Charity, in *casting in all her Living into the Treasury*, Mark 12. 44. He mentions also the Command given to the young Man to *sell whatsoever he had, and give to the Poor*, Mark 10. 21. which he produces (he says) *to shew that*

that none were exempt from this Precept. And then he takes notice of the Community of Goods among the primitive Christians, 'whom he compares to the *Essenes* among the *Jews*, p. 339 *.

If indeed Fraud and Oppression and Injustice be the *Methods to grow rich*, 'tis certain the Gospel condemns them; but if Diligence in Business, if a sober Industry and Temperance, if Honesty and Virtue and Fidelity have a Tendency, as they manifestly have, to the Welfare of the Community, and even of a trading Nation, the Gospel tends highly to promote it. There is nothing in the Scripture to hinder a Man from acquiring Wealth in a lawful way by his own Industry; but there are admirable Instructions given to direct us to a right Use of Riches, and to hinder us from setting too high a Value upon them.

This Gentleman indeed seems mightily concern'd, lest the World should be brought to have too mean an Opinion of the Value of Riches. Hence he finds fault with that noble Aphorism, that *the Love of Money is the Root of all Evil*, p. 336 †. though it is evident, that the Lust of Money has been all along, and still is, the great Source of that Avarice, Oppression, Fraud, Injustice, which has render'd the World a Scene of Confusion and Misery. The best and wisest Moralists in all Ages have thought their Time could not be better employ'd, than in endeavouring to set before Mankind the Vanity and Danger of Riches, and how foolish a thing it is to place Happiness in them. And to convince Men of this, and ingage them to distribute of their Riches for the Uses of Piety and Charity, and to raise their Desires and Views above this present World and the Things of it, to Things of an infinitely higher and nobler Nature, is the evident Design of many
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* P. 307.

† P. 304.

of our Saviour's admirable Maxims, for which *the Pharisees who were covetous derided him*, Luke 16. 14. And our Author thinks fit to imitate them in this, from what Principle I shall not determine.

When our Lord advises, *Sell what ye have and give Alms*, the plain Meaning of this is, that Persons should not only be willing to distribute out of their Superfluities, but in some Cases to put themselves to some Stress and Difficulty; yea, and when extraordinary Occasions and Circumstances make it necessary, (which sometimes was the Case in the first Age of the Christian Church) must be willing to part with their Estates or worldly Substance for the Uses of Piety and Charity. But it never was his Intention to oblige all Christians, at all Times, to give away all that they had, and reserve nothing to themselves. Nor does the Instance this Writer produces of the young Man in the Gospel, whom our Saviour commanded to sell whatsoever he had and follow him, prove this. For this was evidently a special extraordinary Command. This young Man had a very high Opinion of his own Attainments; and therefore our Lord, who knew his Heart, and that Wealth was his Idol, took this Method to discover him to himself. He put him to the Trial, whether he was willing to part with his worldly Substance, and follow him. This was a Command of an extraordinary nature, like that of God to *Abraham to get out of his Country and from his Kindred, &c.* or like that to the Apostles, to *forsake all and follow Christ*; which was never design'd as an universal Precept obligatory on all Christians, and *from which none were exempted*, as our Author expresses it. Indeed it is so far obliging upon all, that every Man must be ready to forsake his worldly Substance, and his Life too, when call'd to it for the Cause of God and a good Conscience; a Trial that good Men are sometimes

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put to in Times of Persecution : but when there is no such special Call, nor any extraordinary Occasion for it, there is nothing in the Gospel to engage Men to part with all their worldly Substance. The ordinary Method of distributing our Charity is clearly explain'd by the Apostle *Paul*. So admirable is the Fulness of the Scriptures, that what is spoken more briefly and generally in one place, is clearly and distinctly explain'd in another. The Rules and Directions he gives are excellent, in the 8th and 9th Chapters of the second Epistle to the *Corinthians* ; see also 1 *Cor.* 16. 2. and they all proceed upon this Supposition, that each Man was to retain his Property, and to give in proportion to his Ability. But there would have been no room for such Directions and Advices, if our Saviour had laid it down as an express Rule, equally obligatory on all Christians, to part with all their Substance, and leave themselves nothing at all. It appears also from those Directions given by the Apostle *Paul*, that though a Community of Goods was practised at the first Settlement of the Church in *Jerusalem*, and there were some Circumstances then that render'd it proper and seasonable, yet it was not design'd to be a lasting Constitution among Christians. Nor indeed was it even then urged upon them as their necessary Duty, and an essential Condition of their Discipleship, (as it was among the *Essenes*, whom this Writer mentions) but was left to every Man's own Discretion, and was in his own power, whether and how far he would do it : as is evident from what the Apostle *Peter* said to *Ananias*, *Acts* 5. 4. *Whilst it remained, was it not thine own ? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power ?*

As to the Instance of the poor Widow, who is commended for casting into the Treasury her two Mites, which was all that she had, even all her
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Living; that is, all that she had to live on for that Day; [see *Grotius in locum*] all that can be justly gathered from it is, that the least Gift shall be accepted, when proceeding from a liberal Mind. The World is apt to be dazzled with great and splendid Donations, and to celebrate the large Benefactions proceeding from an opulent Fortune; but our Saviour has taught us a truer way of judging; that the Value of the Offering shall not be measured by the Greatness of the Gift, but by the Mind of the Donor. A noble Sentiment! and which a candid Critick would have admired.

There are others of our Saviour's Sayings produced by this Writer, concerning which he pronounces with a very decisive Air, that *'tis certain that being interpreted literally, they have run Men into monstrous Absurdities*, p. 339*. Amongst these he reckons such Texts as those, *Blessed are they that mourn; Blessed are ye that weep; Woe unto you that laugh now, ye shall mourn and weep*, Matt. 5. 4. Luke 6. 21, 25. This is designed I suppose to insinuate, that the Gospel is an Enemy to all Delight and Joy, and that it requires Sorrow as such and for its own sake; a Sense which no Man of common Understanding, that reads and considers the Scripture, can put upon the Words. Worldly Sorrow is expressly condemned, 2 Cor. 7. 10. The Blessing here pronounced can therefore only relate to those that *sorrow after a godly sort*, as St. Paul there expresses it, with that *Sorrow which worketh Repentance unto Salvation, never to be repented of*; or it relates to those that endured Affliction and Tribulation for Righteousness-sake, whom our Saviour justly pronounces blessed. The Woe denounced against those that laugh, can only be understood to condemn that thoughtless riotous Mirth which the wise Man calls

* P. 307.

calls the *Laughter of Fools*; a Mirth that renders us insensible to the Distresses of our Fellow-Creatures, and which is an Enemy to all serious Consideration: but none that read the Scripture, can think that all Joy is there forbidden; when we are expressly required to *rejoice evermore*, 1 Theff. 5. 16. and it is represented as the Design for which the Scripture was written, that *our Joy might be full*, 1 John 1. 4.

After having mentioned these and some other noble Aphorisms of our Saviour, such as the Texts about Self-denial, and taking up the Cross, and those that forbid Thoughtfulness for the morrow, which I shall consider afterwards, our Author asks, p. 343 *. *Suppose these Precepts are capable of being paraphras'd so as to promote human Happiness, how do we know this was the Design of the Preacher?* It is easy to answer, that common Sense, and a comparing one Passage of Scripture with another, is sufficient to instruct us in this; and there needs little Sagacity to know, that those Precepts could never be designed in the absurd Sense this Gentleman seems willing to put upon them. He might put the same Question concerning the most celebrated wise Sayings of Antiquity, which in a sententious Brevity comprize a great deal of Instruction; how do we know what was the Meaning of those that first propos'd them? Every one is sensible, that in such short comprehensive Aphorisms, every Expression is not to be carried to the utmost Rigour; and yet the general Design of them is easily known and easily remembered, nor was the Usefulness of them ever doubted. It were to be wish'd this Writer would oblige the World with a Comment upon the most remarkable Adages and wise Sayings of the Ancients, and interpret them by the same Rules which he
seems

seems to think very fair with regard to those of our Saviour. I doubt not it would be a very extraordinary Performance, and that he could easily shew, that many of the most admired Sentences; and which have been thought to comprize a great deal of Wisdom in them, were absurd and senseless, and tended only to mislead People instead of instructing them.

I don't well know what *Rules* those were *among the Essenes much the same with those of our Saviour*, which this Gentleman alledges *they interpreted according to the plain and literal Meaning*. He promises indeed to shew in his next Book, that *the Christians for some Centuries understood most of those Precepts after the same manner*, p. 343*. But I would only put him in mind, that when he undertakes to prove this; it will not be sufficient to produce a single Passage or two that may look this way, since there is nothing so plain but some particular Persons may abuse and pervert it; but it will be expected that he prove that the Christians in general (for it is against the Christians in general that he advances this Charge) understood the Texts he mentions in the Sense he thinks proper to put upon them; that they thought the Poor as such were the Favourites of Heaven; and that the Rich as such were condemn'd, whether godly or not, and without regard to their moral Qualifications; that they thought all Joy was prohibited in the Gospel, and that Sorrow was required and commanded as such; and for its own sake; that they believed our Saviour absolutely forbid all Trade and Industry, all Care and Diligence in their secular Employments, and would have Men labour no more than the Birds or Lilies; that they looked upon themselves to be oblig'd to give all their Goods to the Poor, and to reserve nothing to themselves at all, and to give to every one that

asked them, whether he wanted it or not; that they thought all Self-defence unlawful, which our Author represents as the unanimous Sentiment of the primitive Fathers, though *Grotius* has clearly shewn the contrary, *de Jure Belli & Pacis, Lib. 1. Cap. 2. Sect. 9.* And even the *Essenes*, whom he would have us think the first Christians imitated in this and other Instances, when they travelled carried Arms along with them (as *Josephus* tells us) to defend them from Thieves and Robbers.

A Specimen of his way of proving that the primitive Christians understood the Texts he mentions in what he calls the plain literal Sense, he himself gives us, p. 340*. where he represents the *primitive Fathers* (without excepting any of them) as understanding the Words of our Saviour, *Matt. 19. 12.* literally of Men's castrating themselves. And yet he may be challenged to name any one of them that did so (though several of them have occasion to mention it) besides *Origen*, who was universally condemn'd for it. And indeed any one that carefully considers that whole Passage, will easily find, that when our Saviour talks of those who *made themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake*, it can only be understood of those who abstained from Marriage, that they might more freely attend to the Gospel. Compare *1 Cor. 7. 32, 35.* for it is the abstaining from Marriage, that he is there talking of, as is plain from *v. 10.* This is *the Saying that all Men cannot receive, save they to whom it is given, v. 11.* And of this therefore it is to be understood, *v. 12.* when after the Words cited by our Author, he adds, *he that is able to receive it, let him receive it.* The Design of this whole Passage of our Saviour is very clearly explained by the Apostle *Paul, 1 Cor. 7. 2, 7, 9, 26.* So that in this, as well as other Instances, the Scripture is its own best In-

terpreter ; and a Man of common Understanding needs no other Direction than what the Scripture it self furnishes him with, to preserve him from the absurd Constructions this Author would put upon our Saviour's Words.

But he urges, " That the Nature of moral Rules requires they should be interpreted in the literal Sense, especially such as are designed to govern the Actions of the most ignorant and illiterate, and taught by a Person whose infinite Knowledge must enable him so to express himself, as that his Words should not be liable to the least Misconstruction, p. 343*.

If by saying that the Nature of moral Rules requires they should be interpreted in the literal Sense, he intends to signify, that no moral Precepts can ever be delivered in a proverbial way, or comprehended in short Aphorisms, which are seldom to be taken in the utmost Strictness; or that in all moral Instructions, every thing is to be taken in the most strict and rigid literal Sense, and no Allowance made for any figurative Expressions at all, his Observation is not just. 'Tis sufficient if those moral Precepts be deliver'd in such a manner, that the Design and Sense of them may be easily understood by Persons of ordinary Capacities that carefully consider them. And such are the moral Precepts of the Gospel, which this Gentleman himself elsewhere owns to be both *pure and plain*, p. 108*. But to require (as he seems here to do) that they should be so expressed, as that the *Words should not be liable to the least Misconstruction*, is a most unreasonable Demand. The plainest Words may be misconstrued and perverted, either through the Ignorance and Negligence, or through the Perverseness of Men. Nor is it possible to prevent all *Misconstructions*, except God, by

* P. 311.

† P. 93.

a most extraordinary miraculous Exertion of his Power, should heal all Men's Understandings, and rectify their Wills, and remove their Prejudices at once. This Author thinks God has made the Law of Nature very plain and clear; but is it so plain that no Man can mistake it? or will he say that God is obliged to prevent all the Misconstructions that he foresees will be made of his Law? that is, that he is obliged to prevent all the Sins and Errors of Mankind, or else he shall be charg'd with a want of Goodness or Wisdom? I see no Tendency in such Reasonings as these, but to introduce downright Atheism.



C H A P. IX.

That many of those Passages of Scripture, which this Writer censures as obscure and apt to mislead the People, are so noble and excellent, that a candid Critick would have judged them worthy of Admiration.

THE Author of *Christianity as Old as the Creation* suffers his Prejudices against the Scriptures to carry him so far, that in attempting to prove them useless and obscure, he is pleased to censure several Passages which contain such noble Sentiments as really do honour to the sacred Writings. Such are many of the excellent Aphorisms that have been already mentioned.

Any one that was not so deeply prejudiced against the Scriptures as this Gentleman, would have admired that sublime Passage of the Apostle Paul, *All Things are yours, whether this World, or Life, or Death, or Things present, or Things to*
Q² come,

come, *all Things are yours*, 1 Cor. 3. 22. and that of our Saviour, *Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth*, Matt. 5. 5. The Design of which, and others to the same purpose, is not to signify that all true Christians shall be rich and great in this World, (which is the Turn this Writer is pleased to give them, but which none that carefully reads the Scriptures can possibly suppose to be the Sense of 'em) but to inculcate this useful Instruction, that the Practice of Righteousness lays the best Foundation for Happiness here as well as hereafter; that good Men have the truest Enjoyment even of temporal Blessings; that all Things shall work together for their Good; and even the Afflictions and Crosses they are exposed to here for the sake of God and a good Conscience, shall be abundantly compensated by Blessings and Comforts of a nobler nature, arising from a Sense of the divine Favour and the Joys of his Spirit. There are many Texts tending this way; glorious Passages, which no good Man would wish out of the Scripture, and which furnish the greatest Encouragements to Virtue, and to an ingenuous Confidence in the divine Goodness.

What a strange Spirit of Criticism must it be that carries a Man to find fault with that admirable Passage of our Saviour, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect*, Matt. 5. 48. and that of the Apostle Peter, which represents it as the Design of the Promises of the Gospel, that *by these we might be made Partakers of the divine Nature, and might escape the Corruption that is in the World thro' Lust*, 2 Pet. 1. 4. The Sentiments here are so excellent, and truly sublime, and the Expressions have such a noble Ardour, and Elevation in them, as a candid Critick would have pronounced worthy of Admiration. And this Gentleman himself, who here censures them, is
pleased

pleased elsewhere to adopt them for his own. See his 3d Chapter, p. 24*. Nor is there any danger, that any Man of a common Capacity that reads and considers the Scripture, (which every where makes such glorious Descriptions of God's transcendent Greatness and unequal'd Perfections, and tends to impress us with the deepest Sense of our own Imperfection and Insufficiency) should imagine that it is the Intention of these Expressions to signify, that it is possible for us to attain to an equal Degree of Perfection with God himself, but that we should aim to approach nearer and nearer in a happy Imitation, to the best of Beings, the glorious Pattern of Perfection.

Among the excellent Passages of Scripture that convey the most useful Instruction, are those that teach us in every thing to raise our Thoughts and Views to God, and to regard his Agency and Influence. Yet these Passages have not escap'd the malevolent Censure of the Author. He mentions it as a Fault and as a Difficulty in the Scripture, that *most Things that are owing to second Causes, are referr'd immediately to God*, p. 337*. and that *we cannot know from thence, what things are owing immediately to God, or to second Causes, since every thing that was thought to be good, even voluntary Actions themselves, are immediately ascribed to God*. He instances in Bezaleel's receiving his Art from God, Ex. 31. 3, 4. that God *instructs the Plowman to sow and thresh*, Isa. 28. 26, 29. where it is said, *this also comes from the Lord of Hosts, &c.* But any Reader of common Understanding, needs not be informed, that the Design of such Texts as these is not to exclude second Causes, but that we should not terminate our Views in them, as we are very prone to do, but look above them to the supreme. There is no great danger of our ascribing too little to second Causes. We know very well without the Scriptures that a Man of a mecha-

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* P. 20.

† P. 306.

nical Genius, as *Bezaleel* was, can do curious Works; and that the skilful Plowman knows how to manage his Land, and observe the proper Seasons. But it is a noble Instruction to lead our Thoughts to God, as the supreme Author and Disposer, from whom this and every other Gift and Blessing comes, and to be thankful to him for all our Advantages and Improvements, even in common Life. And this is the admirable Lesson that these Passages of Scripture, which this Gentleman censures, are design'd to teach us.

It is with the same Candor that he blames the Scriptures for ascribing *every good Motion in us to the Spirit of God*, that is, for teaching us to give God the Glory of all the Good we do, p. 337*. than which there cannot be a nobler Proof of the Excellency of the Scriptures, and whereby it is gloriously distinguish'd above other Writings. Perhaps this Writer approves of *Cotta's* Sentiment in *Cicero*, *Judicium hoc omnium Mortalium est, Fortunam a Deo petendam, a seipso sumendam esse Sapientiam*; that though we may apply for Riches, and such outward Advantages to God, yet we owe our Wisdom and Virtue wholly to our selves, and are not beholden to God for it at all. And if this was, (as he represents it) the common Opinion of all Mankind in the Heathen World, they certainly wanted to be better instructed. I need not take notice of this Writer's Sneer concerning good *Motions* produced in us, *without Understanding*. The Passage he alledges for the Support of it from *1 Cor. 14. 15.* does not at all intimate, that he that pray'd with the Spirit, or by an extraordinary Gift and Afflatus of the Spirit, did not himself understand what he pray'd; but that when he pray'd in an unknown Tongue, others did not understand him; and therefore the Apostle *Paul* declares,

clares, *I will pray with or by the Spirit, I will pray with the Understanding also*; that is, I will so pray with the Spirit, that others may understand me: that this is the Sense of that Passage, is extremely evident from that whole Chapter, particularly ver. 4, 14, 16, 19.

It is another Excellency of the Scripture, and which ought to recommend those sacred Writings to our Esteem, that we are there taught to regard all the Events that befall us, whether prosperous or adverse, as wisely order'd, govern'd, and directed in every Circumstance by Divine Providence. This is the evident Design of that Passage mention'd by the Author, *Isa. 45. 7. I the Lord make Peace, and create Evil*, where, as by *Peace* we are according to Scripture Language to understand all kind of Blessings and Prosperity, so by *Evil* we are to understand Adversity and Calamity. To the same purpose it is said, *Amos 3. 6. Is there Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it?* The Author produces this as an Instance that in the Scripture God is said to *do* what he only *permits*. But this would destroy the Emphasis of the Passage. For as it evidently relates to the Evil of Afflictions, so it signifies more than a bare Permission, even a wise and holy Agency and Direction of God in these things; that he is not a mere idle Spectator, but that he exercises a governing Care and Superintendency. And certainly no Consideration can have a happier Influence to form us to a resigned Frame under Afflictions, and to engage us to a just Improvement of them, than to regard them as sent and ordered by God our heavenly Father, the wise and righteous Governor of the World, for our Correction and Amendment, for the Punishment of our Sins, or the Exercise and Improvement of our Virtues.

This Writer finds fault with those Precepts of our Saviour that require Self-denial, and taking up the Cross, and which furnish so glorious a Proof of the Divine Spirit of the Author of our Religion; who if he had strove to recommend himself to the World in an artful way, and to accommodate himself to Men's Passions and Prejudices, would never have given such Precepts as these, or have made them the Conditions of our Discipleship. But the Design of them is noble and excellent. It is not that we should divest ourselves of Humanity, or renounce all Regard to the true Happiness and Glory of our Nature; but it is to ingage us to subdue our corrupt Appetites and Passions, and to be ready to sacrifice our present worldly Interests and the Inclinations of the Flesh, to the nobler Interests of Piety, Righteousness, Truth, and Charity; and to restrain that immoderate Selfishness, which, where it prevails, extinguishes every noble and generous Sentiment, and causes Men to breathe nothing but what is low, and base, and sordid.

Nor have those admirable Precepts of our Saviour that relate to our forgiving Injuries, and loving our Enemies, met with better Treatment from this Author. As to the former, the forgiving Injuries, he thinks, "that except interpreted consistently with what the Light of Nature dictates
 " to be our Duty, in preserving our Reputation,
 " Liberty and Property; and in doing all we can
 " in our several Stations, to hinder all Injury
 " and Injustice from others as well as ourselves,
 " it would be a Doctrine attended with fatal Con-
 " sequences: so that the Expediency, or even Law-
 " fulness of forgiving Injuries, depends on such
 " Circumstances as human Discretion is to judge
 " of." He adds, that "if a Man, taking ad-
 " vantage of my Good-nature, injures me the
 " more, and more frequently, because he may do

“ it with Impunity, the Precept of forgiving does
“ not bar me of a legal Remedy, p. 340, 341 *.”
I suppose then he would have had our Saviour address his Hearers thus: You must be ready to forgive Injuries, provided still that you take care to secure your own Reputation, Liberty and Property, and hinder all Injury and Injustice from yourselves as well as others; you must so far forgive, as not by a too tame Conduct and too great Lenity to draw fresh Injuries upon your selves; and it must be left to your own Discretion, to judge when this is the Case. But supposing our Saviour had addressed his Disciples after this manner, would not this have been to defeat the Design of the admirable Counsel he gives them? It certainly would be better to give no Precept relating to this matter at all, since Men would have pleaded such a Limitation if expressed, as giving a Sanction to their Resentment. In truth there is no danger of what the Author seems afraid of, that Men should not be forward enough to vindicate their own Reputation, or should, by a too great Patience and Slowness in resenting Injuries, draw fresh Injuries upon themselves. The Danger lies wholly the other way; and our Lord, who was perfectly acquainted with human Nature, knew this very well. It would have been impertinent in him to have caution’d them against this. Every Man will be too apt in this case to make or find out Excuses and Limitations for himself.

Our Author, it’s probable, thinks he carries it a great way, when he tells us, that *the Precept of forgiving*, though it allows us to resent and revenge Injuries, when we apprehend the passing them by would draw fresh Injuries upon us, yet *it forbids us to punish for Punishment sake*. So when a Man thinks proper to fight and kill another for a disrespectful

spectful and injurious Word, he may say he takes no pleasure in killing his Adversary, but only in vindicating his own Reputation. And if any should say, that it is a slight Injury, and does not demand so violent a Resentment; he may reply, that it wrongs his Reputation and Honour, which is dearer to him than his Life, and that if he let this go unpunish'd, there would be no living with Satisfaction. 'Tis true, our Author sends Persons to the Magistrate for punishing the Injuries offer'd them; but what shall be done in Cases not cognizable by the Magistrate? There are many things that bear hard upon a Man's Reputation, for which yet the Magistrate and the Laws make no provision. And might it not be said, according to the Author's way of arguing, that if a Man passes by such Affronts, this is the way to expose him to Contempt and to new Injuries? Since therefore it is every Man's Duty to *preserve his Reputation, and to secure himself from Injury*, he must do himself justice, and (to use the modish Phrase) demand a Gentleman's Satisfaction. 'Tis such Pretences as these patroniz'd by the Author, and which he leaves to every Man's own *Discretion*, that have render'd Feuds immortal, and have given countenance in all Ages to that Revenge, that Malice, and Retaliation of Injuries, which has produced such infinite Mischiefs in the World, and has so often disturb'd, and still continues to do so, the Peace and Order of Societies. And it was every way worthy of our Saviour, who was the greatest Lover of Mankind, and who well knew the strong Propension Men have to keen Resentment and Revenge, to offer such Precepts and Arguments as might be most effectual to restrain and subdue it. He has done so, and nothing can be more admirable than what he offers to this purpose. He does not merely content himself with such a general Maxim as that of *Confucius*, that

we are never to revenge Injuries; which our Author prefers for its Clearness and Simplicity to those of our Saviour, for no other reason that I know of, but the Prejudice he has in favour of *Confucius* rather than of *Jesus Christ*. He treats the Subject with far greater Distinctness. He inforces it with the most powerful Arguments and Motives. He sets before us the divine Patience and Goodness towards us in forgiving the innumerable Sins we are guilty of; he lets us know, that except we forgive the Injuries of others against us, we cannot hope for Forgiveness from God; he teaches us in our Prayers to beg Forgiveness from God, as we forgive those that have offended us. He exemplifies and illustrates it by an admirable Parable, very proper to strike and affect the Mind, and which immediately follows the Passage cited and censur'd by our Author, *Matth. 18. 23, 35.* How full and excellent the Instructions are which our Saviour gives on this Head, will appear to any Man that will carefully consider and compare the following Passages, *Matth. 6. 14, 15. Matth. 18. 15, 16, 17, 21, 35. Mark 11. 25, 26. Luke 17. 3, 4.* And in the other Parts of the New Testament, the Apostles, who breath'd the same kind and gentle and benevolent Spirit with their blessed Lord, repeat the excellent Advice he gives, and inforce it with a Variety of Arguments and Motives; see *Eph. 4. 31, 32. Col. 3. 12, 13. 1 Thess. 5. 14, 15. 1 Pet. 2. 21, 23. and 3. 9.* but especially *Rom. 12. 17, 21. Recompence to no Man Evil for Evil. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all Men. Dearly Beloved, avenge not your selves, but rather give place unto Wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine Enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him Drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap Coals of Fire on his Head. Be not overcome of Evil; but overcome Evil with Good.*

But

But this excellent Passage could not escape the ill-natur'd Censure of the Author. He thinks, that *treating an Enemy thus, can't sure be an Argument of Love; since 'tis in order to have the divine Vengeance fall on his Head*, p. 343 *. But certainly there cannot be a more perverse Construction put upon this Passage, than to suppose that the Apostle here exhorts us to do good to our Enemies, merely with a Design to bring divine Vengeance upon them. The immediate Design of doing good to an Enemy, is to overcome him with Kindness, to *overcome Evil with Good*, as the Apostle here expresses it. But whereas it might be said, What if the Enemy should grow worse by my Kindness? Is it not better to let him perish, than by nourishing him to give him an Opportunity to destroy me, and to do me new and greater Injuries? To obviate this, the Apostle lets us know, that if our Enemy makes a bad use of our Kindness, and continues unjust and ungrateful still, God will plead our Cause, and punish his Ingratitude. So that the plain Design of this admirable Passage, obvious to every common Reader, is this: Go on to do good, strive to overcome thy Enemy with Kindness; if thou dost, thou hast gain'd him; if not, if he returns Evil for Good, let not this discourage thee; for know thy Cause is in the hand of God, the wise and righteous Governor of the World, to whom Vengeance belongs, who sees and will avenge the Wrong, and will punish thy Enemy in proportion to the Greatness of his Ingratitude. And how happy would it be for the World and for Mankind, if the Design of this Precept were pursued! if Men could but be persuaded to commit their Cause to God, and leave it to him to avenge their Wrongs, instead of being so forward to do it themselves! What Mischiefs
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* P. 310.

and Contentions, what a Reciprocation of Injuries would this prevent!

This Writer's last Attempt against the Doctrine of the Gospel relating to forgiving Injuries is, that *there is nothing new in it rightly stated*. But supposing there were nothing in this Doctrine, as deliver'd in the Gospel, but what had been advanced by some one or other before, yet it might be highly useful to have it inforced and recommended by a divine Authority. There were some of the Philosophers that said noble things concerning forgiving Injuries, as *Plato, Maximus Tyrius, &c.* who carry it much further than this Gentleman does with all his refin'd Morality. [See *Grotius in Matt. 5. 39.*] But then it was but the Opinion of those particular Men, who had not Authority enough to inforce it as a Law upon Mankind. It was contradicted by others of the Philosophers, as *Aristotle and Tully*. And *Plato* in his *Crito*, where he introduces *Socrates* saying excellent things concerning forgiving Injuries, and the Unlawfulness of returning Injury for Injury, at the same time owns, that what he deliver'd was contrary to the Sentiment of the *οἱ πολλοί*, the Multitude, or the Generality of Mankind. And what Authority could he pretend to, that should oblige Mankind to regard his Opinion as a Law? Upon the whole, I may safely leave it to the Judgment of every unprejudiced Person, whether it were better to leave this Matter at large (as this Author would have it) *to human Discretion and Prudence*, and to what every Man thinks proper for *preserving his own Reputation, &c.* or to restrain Revenge by a divine Command, and to bind it upon us as our Duty to forgive those that have injur'd us, and inforce it upon us by the strongest Arguments and Motives, such as are proposed to us in the Gospel; and which may be so far said to be new, that they have

have something in them far stronger and more engaging than any thing that was ever delivered on that Subject before. And if we must judge of the Excellency of Precepts by the Rule our Author sometimes advances, of their Tendency to promote the publick Good; then these Precepts of our Saviour are admirable, which, if generally observed, would have the most beneficial Influence on the Peace and Happiness of Mankind; Nations, Families, and particular Persons.

I need not add any thing to shew, that our Saviour does not design (as this Gentleman insinuates) by the Precepts he gives concerning forgiving Injuries, to hinder or forbid the Magistrates to punish Malefactors. His Doctrine evidently relates to private Revenge, and does not meddle with the Office of the Magistrate: no more than the Apostle *Paul* does, when he gives the same Precepts with our Saviour on this Head, and requires us to *render to no Man Evil for Evil*, and yet immediately after represents the Magistrates as *not bearing the Sword in vain*, but appointed by God for the *Punishment of Evil-doers*; see *Rom. 12. 17, 21.* compared with *Rom. 13. 1, 4.*

Our Author gives us a farther Specimen of his Candor, in the Attempt he makes to expose that excellent Precept of our Saviour, whereby he commands us to *love our Enemies, to do good to them that hate us, to pray for those that despitefully use us and persecute us.* A Passage that contains so sublime a Morality, that any Man that like our Author pretends a high Regard to Virtue, ought to be ashamed to censure it. The evident Design of it is, to subdue and heal that bitter and malevolent Spirit that has produced such Mischiefs in the World, and which carries Men to hate, to revile, to worry and destroy one another; to ingage us to be ready to assist and do good to all Men,
and

and even to render Good for Evil; and to teach us that no particular Enmities or Disgusts should break off the common Ties of Humanity. A noble Instruction! worthy of the great Saviour and Lover of Mankind; than which nothing could have a happier Tendency to extinguish Hatred and Animosities, and promote universal Peace and Concord.

But this Writer, who seems willing to apologize for some of the worst Principles of the human Nature, Hatred, Malice, Revenge, instead of admiring this excellent Precept, thinks fit to pass a peevish Censure upon it. He argues, as if he thought it was designed to reconcile us to the Love of Men's Vices, and to lessen our Horror and Detestation of their Crimes and Wickedness; or to hinder the Magistrate from bringing Evil-doers to condign Punishment; Things evidently very remote from our Saviour's Intention. No Man of common Understanding, that reads and considers the Gospel, can think that he designed to require, that we should have an equal Affection and Esteem for good and bad Men, for the Righteous and the Wicked, as this candid Writer insinuates. We may indeed justly suppose, that it was his Intention, that we should in many Cases distinguish between Persons and Actions; a Distinction which this Gentleman seems unwilling to allow. For he tells us, that *Actions are not the proper Objects of Love and Hatred, but Persons for the sake of their Actions*; and he insinuates, that *since the Actions of some Men are too detestable to create in us any Sentiments, but of Aversion*, therefore we should have a Hatred and Horror for the Persons that commit them, p. 342 *. but the Distinction in many Cases is just and proper. Though we ought to abhor all wicked Actions, (and those must be utter Strangers to the Gospel, who do not know that it

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* P. 309.

every where tends to inspire us with a Horror of Vice and Sin) yet we may pity and pray for the Persons that commit them; we may consider them as our Fellow-creatures; as capable of being reclaimed; and as having some good Qualities, though guilty of great Faults. And these may be our Sentiments, even with regard to our Persecutors themselves.

This Writer indeed prescribes a quite different Conduct from our Saviour. Instead of praying for our Persecutors, he would have us hate them like the Devil. "If we ought not (says he) nay, cannot love the Devil, because our Enemy, how can we love those Devils incarnate, those Enemies of God and Men, who hate and persecute Men for shewing their Love to God, in following the Dictates of Conscience? *ibid.*" I will easily grant, that to persecute Men for their conscientious Differences in Religion, is a great Evil; but at the same time I believe, that some that persecute others that dissent from them, may do it from a misguided Zeal for what they judge to be the Cause of God, which was the Case of *Paul* before his Conversion. We cannot, and ought not to love the Devil, not merely *because he is our Enemy*, as this Gentleman expresses it, but because he is the obstinate Enemy of all Good; he is incorrigible, and there is no Hope of his Amendment. But this is not always the Case, with respect to Men that persecute us. They may perhaps be carried away by mistaken Notions; there is room to pray for them, and wish their Amendment; they may have valuable Qualities in other respects, and may possibly be reclaimed from their wrong Sentiments and Prejudices. We may therefore pray for them, and if it ever comes to be in our power, may render them Good for Evil, instead of giving way to furious Passions and Resentment. A meek

meek patient Behaviour is what best becomes us, and what may possibly gain and disarm the Malice of our Enemies.

Nothing can be more excellent than the Argument our Saviour offers to ingage us to love and do good to our Enemies, drawn from the Example of God himself, who does good to the *Unthankful and the Evil*, and causes *his Sun to shine, and his Rain to descend upon the Just and upon the Unjust*. But our Author, who seems resolved at any rate to find fault with the noblest Sentiments, if delivered by our Saviour, can't let this pass without Censure. To take away the Force of the Argument drawn from God's causing his Sun to shine, and his Rain to descend on the Evil and Good; he asks, *How could it be otherwise in the present State of Things?* p. 342. I can make nothing of this Reflection, except the Meaning be, that God could not have ordered it otherwise; that the present Course of Things is by a blind fatal Necessity, and must go on in this way whether God will or no; which is downright Atheism, and amounts to a Denial of God, or of his Providence. For if this present State of Things be owing to the wise and gracious Ordination of divine Providence, our Saviour's Argument holds good. Does not the Sun shine, and the Rain descend upon the Just and Unjust? And are not these great Benefits and Instances of Goodness sown to the Evil as well as the Good? and is it not God that appointed and settled this Course of Things, and put it in this Method, which he saw would produce this Effect? Does not God therefore do good even to the Evil and Unthankful in the ordinary Course of Things? And if so, can there be a nobler Example, than to propose the universal Goodness of God to our Imitation? If he who is so infinitely above us, does so much good in the Methods of his common Pro-

vidence to those that offend him, ought not we to bear with those of the same Species with our selves, and be ready to do them good even tho' they injure and offend us? But this Gentleman has found out an excellent Knack for vacating all our Obligations to the divine Goodness, for any of the common Blessings of his Providence; it is but saying, this is the Course of Things, and then we are not obliged to be thankful to God on this account at all. A most disingenuous way of arguing, when it is the Goodness of God that has appointed and settled the present State of Things.

That beautiful Passage in the 6th of *Matthew*, from the 25th Verse to the end, in which our Saviour cautions us, against an immoderate Anxiety and distrustful Care about worldly Things, and endeavours to ingage Men to a firm Trust and Dependence on divine Providence, does also fall under the Animadversion of this froward Censurer. When our Saviour argues from the Care God takes of the inanimate and brute Creation, the Lilies of the Field, and Fowls of the Air, to shew that much more is the rational Creation, and especially good Men, under the special Care of his kind Providence; this Writer insinuates, that this might lead Men to conclude that they need take no more Pains or Care than the Lilies, who neither toil nor spin. But the plain Design of the Argument is no more than this, that that most wise and beneficent Being, whose Care extends even to the inanimate and brute Creatures in a way suited to their Nature and Condition, will much more take care to provide for Mankind in a way suited to the Condition of the rational Nature. And this ought to prevent our giving way to anxious distracting Cares; the most effectual Remedy against which is a firm and lively Persuasion, that we and all our Concernments and Affairs are under the special fatherly

fatherly Care of a divine Providence. But no Man that governs himself by the Scripture is in danger of thinking that a prudent Care and Diligence in Business is there forbidden, which on the contrary is frequently recommended in the strongest manner as our Duty. Many of the Proverbs of *Solomon* are intended this way. And in the New Testament it is expressly declar'd, that *if any Man would not work, neither should he eat*; and those that are idle, are represented as *walking disorderly*; *2 Thes.* 3. 10, 11, 12. There are many Precepts to this purpose, requiring Men to do their own Business, and to work with their own Hands; see *Eph.* 14. 28. *1 Thes.* 4. 11. *Tit.* 3. 8, 14. so that in this as well as other Instances that have been mention'd, the Scripture itself sufficiently guards every attentive Reader from the perverse Constructions that our Author would put upon those Passages.



CHAP. X.

The Author's Objection against the Gospel-Precepts drawn from their being deliver'd in a loose, general, undetermined Manner, consider'd; his own Rules, which he proposes for the Direction of the Vulgar, are far more general and indeterminate. His Argument for the Obscurity of the Scripture from the Divisions there are among Christians about the Sense of it, and his Pretence that this would infer the Necessity of an infallible Guide, examin'd.

IN order to prove that the Scripture-Revelation is obscure, and of no use to direct us in our Duty,

Duty, he frequently repeats it, that the " Rules there laid down are expressed in a loose, general, and undetermined Manner." And he thinks " Rules concerning Morality should be suited to Men's particular Circumstances, plainly describing the Conduct which they require, p. 344 *." And he had observed before, p. 18 †. that " it is impossible to have Rules laid down by external Revelation for every particular Case, since Men's Circumstances are ever varying." And again, p. 27 ‖, " that since 'tis impossible in any Book or Books that a particular Rule could be given for every particular Case, we must even then have had recourse to the Light of Nature to teach us in most Cases."

My first Remark upon this Reasoning of the Author is, that if it concludes against the Usefulness of an external Revelation, it will equally conclude against all Books of Morality, against all the Writings of the most celebrated Philosophers and Legislators, that were designed to instruct Men in their Duty: Since, by the Author's own Acknowledgment, *'tis impossible that in any Book or Books a particular Rule could be given for every particular Case.* But in this he has the common Sentiment of Mankind against him, and of the wisest Men in all Ages, who have always thought they did great Service to Mankind, by giving general Rules for the Direction of their Conduct, which Men's own Reason and Prudence must apply to particular Cases. And he would be justly esteemed a very unreasonable Man, that should take upon him to assert, that no general Rule can be of any Use, except all the Exceptions to that Rule, and all the particular Cases that may possibly happen, be distinctly specify'd.

It will readily be owned, that whatever Rules or Instructions are given by any external Revelation,

* P. 311.

† P. 16.

‖ P. 22, 23.

tion, or if any be given at all, something must still be left to the Reason and Prudence of Mankind. And if this will prove, as this Writer often insinuates, that therefore in this Case we are as much left to our selves, as if there was no Revelation at all; it will equally prove, that because our Reason is necessary to make a right use of any Books or Instructions whatsoever, that therefore all Books and Instructions are perfectly useless and needless; that is, because Reason can do well with the Assistance of those Books and Rules, therefore Reason can do as well without that Assistance; or because Reason must apply those Directions, therefore those Directions are of no use; when on the contrary it appears, that they are of Use, because our Reason can apply them; and they would be of no Use or Advantage at all, if our Reason could not apply them. All Rules and Directions still suppose us reasonable Creatures, capable of making a proper Use of those Directions, and applying them to particular Cases and Circumstances: But does this prove, that therefore those Rules are useless, and had as good not have been given at all?

The Author observes indeed, " That the municipal Laws of every Country are designed to be suited to Men's particular Circumstances, p. 344 *." But neither can these descend to every particular Circumstance. Besides, supposing a Revelation given for the general Direction of Mankind, it is not designed to supersede the particular municipal Laws of every Country, or to be instead of them; no more than it is designed to settle all the various Forms of Government, and all the particular Rights, Privileges, and Customs in every Country. But it does not follow, that because it leaves room for every Country to have its own municipal Laws, provided there be nothing

in those Laws contrary to the general Law of God, that therefore it is of no use at all. 'Tis true that God, who perfectly sees and knows all Things, might if he had pleased have given a Revelation that should have descended to the particular Rights, Usages and Customs of every City and Country, and even have taken in all the Circumstances and Events of each particular Person's Life, with particular Directions how to behave under them all. But how immensely voluminous must such a Revelation be? who could ever have Time to read or to consider it? and how odd is it in this Author, who more than once accuses the Scriptures as *voluminous Writings*, to blame them for not descending to all those minute Particularities, which would have rendered them infinitely more voluminous?

He seems further to complain, that our Duties are not treated in Scripture in the same way in which the Writers of Morals treat them; as in *Aristotle's Ethicks*, *Tully's Offices*, and the moral *Treatises* of Grotius and Puffendorf, where the Reason and Connection between them, and their Dependence on one another, are plainly seen, p. 332*. As if the divine Legislator, on Supposition of his giving a Revelation to Mankind prescribing their Duty, must deduce the Precepts he gives in a long course of Reasoning, after the manner of the Moralists; a Thing which would be thought absurd and impertinent in a human Law-giver. The Laws of God come with greater Force as they are delivered in Scripture in the Name of God himself, enforced by his supreme Authority, and with the most awful and important Sanctions of the divine Promises and Threatnings, than if drawn out into a subtil Thread of Reasoning, like that made use of by the Writers of Ethicks; and which

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* P. 300.

however just is for the most part so abstracted, as to be above the Capacity of the Vulgar. And whatever this Gentleman may think, the People will much more easily comprehend the simple and express Precepts of Holy Writ, and discern the Force of the powerful Motives there urged, than the fine Reasonings of the Moralists, who after all can pretend to no Authority to make their Sentiments pass for Laws. For what is the Authority of *Aristotle* or *Tully*, of *Grotius* or *Puffendorf*, that their Notions of Things should be binding on Mankind? It is to be feared the People would be apt generally to regard them, as the Heathens commonly did the Writings of their Philosophers, as little more than fine Amusements. And it is very probable, that those who now find fault with the Scriptures for not treating Duties in such a way of Reasoning as the Writers of Ethicks, would, if they had done so, have made this an Objection, and have represented this as exceeding the Capacity of the Vulgar, as well as below the Majesty of the supreme Legislator.

But this Writer goes on to observe in the Passage now cited, p. 332*. “ that in the Scripture
“ Things are not generally so treated, as that Men
“ may precisely know the Nature and Extent of
“ their Duty; but are for the most part deliver-
“ ed in such a general, undetermined, nay some-
“ times parabolical and hyperbolical Manner, as
“ did we not consult our Reason, and learn our
“ Duty from thence, the Letter might lead us
“ wrong; nay, the Apostle himself says, *The Let-
“ ter killeth.*”

Not to take notice at present of his manifest Abuse of that Passage of the Apostle *Paul*, nor of what he mentions concerning the parabolical and hyperbolical way in which some of the Gospel-

Precepts are delivered, which has been sufficiently considered already; I shall only observe, that notwithstanding the Complaints he makes of the moral Precepts of Scripture being general and undetermin'd, they are for the most part delivered in such a way as to render the Application sufficiently easy to any Man of tolerable Prudence and Care, that will apply himself seriously to the performance of his Duty. What is more briefly and generally expressed in one Passage, is more distinctly treated in others. And it is a very great Fallacy in this Writer to produce a few general Rules, as if these were the only Rules given in Scripture, and as if it did not descend to a more particular Account of our Duty.

Thus he mentions that Rule of the Apostle Paul, Phil. 4. 8. *Whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report, if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, think on these Things*; and then asks, *Is not this referring us to the Light of Nature, to know what these Things are?* p. 205, 381*. And I will freely own, that if the Scripture only gave us such a general Rule as this, (however excellent and comprehensive it may appear to be) and did not any where more distinctly point out to us the Particulars of our Duty, and instruct us what Things are *true*, and *honest*, and *just*, and *pure*, and *lovely*, *virtuous* and *praise-worthy*, this would not yield any great Direction, and would be only a referring us to the Light of Nature. But this is not the Case. There is scarce any Duty reducible to any one of these general Heads, but what is particularly explained and enforced, not merely in a single Passage, but in many Passages of the sacred Writings; nor is there any

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part of our Duty, with respect to God, our Neighbours, or our selves, but what is there particularly insisted on.

This Writer is pleased to instance in some general Precepts of Scripture, which he thinks are delivered in so loose and general a Manner as to be of little Use. One is that in *Col. 3. 22. Tit. 2. 9.* where Servants are commanded *to obey their Masters in all Things, and to please them well in all Things*; and then he asks, "Is the measure of Obedience due from Servants to Masters any otherwise to be learnt, than from the Agreement of the Parties, or the Custom of the Country?" p. 344*. And would he in good earnest have the particular Form and Conditions of each Contract between Master and Servant, the Time of the Service, and the particular Services he is to be put to, particularly expressed and specified in the divine Law, or else it can be of no use? But even the general Precepts relating to the Duties of Servants, as delivered in Scripture, are of admirable Use; and if duly observed, would have excellent Effects, as would have appeared if the Author had transcribed the whole Passage he refers to, *Col. 3. 22, &c. Servants obey in all Things* (concerning which general Expression see above, p. 203.) *your Masters according to the Flesh, not with Eye-service, as Men-pleasers, but in Singleness of Heart, fearing God; and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto Men*, [or, as it is expressed, *Eph. 6. 7. with good Will doing Service, as to the Lord, and not to Men*] *knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the Reward of the Inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*; [or as it is expressed, *Eph. 6. 8. knowing that whatsoever good Thing any Man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*] The other Passage re-

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ferr'd to by the Author, *Tit. 2. 9, 10.* runs thus, *Exhort Servants to be obedient unto their own Masters, and to please them well in all Things, not answering again, not purloining, but shewing all good Fidelity, that they may adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things; for the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation, hath appeared unto all Men, &c.* In these Passages, to which others might be added, the Duty of Servants to Masters is set in a just and noble Light. It is fix'd on its proper Foundation, secured and inforced by the most excellent Motives, and which, where they are really believed and considered, must have a much stronger Influence than mere Custom or the Laws of the Country. They are directed to do what they do as unto the Lord, with a Regard to the divine Approbation and Acceptance, and are promised a glorious Reward hereafter for their Fidelity and Diligence. And if Servants would but govern themselves by these admirable Rules, it would make them excellent in that Relation, and they would do their Duty with Diligence and Cheerfulness. See further concerning the Duties of Masters and Servants, *Deut. 24. 14, 15. Eph. 6. 8, 9. Col. 4. 1. 1 Tim. 6. 3, 4.*

Another Instance this Writer mentions, is that Precept of our Saviour that commands us to *render unto Cæsar the Things that are Cæsar's.* "But (says he) must not we learn from the Laws in every Nation, who is *Cæsar*? and what is his Due? *ibid.*" The Author is not more fortunate in his Choice of this Instance than of the former. Supposing a divine Revelation given to Mankind, it was no way proper that it should descend to a particular Account of the several kinds of Government in the several Nations of the World, and the Measures of Obedience due to each; or that it should enter into a minute detail of Politicks, set-

ting the distinct Rights of Princes and People; and if the Gospel had pretended to do this, these Gentlemen would have been the first to explode it, and would have regarded this as a certain Proof that it was a political Institution, designed wholly for political Views. Yet it was very fit that in a System of divine Laws given for the Direction of Mankind, there should be general Rules, prescribing the Duty of Subjects towards Magistrates, and regulating the Conduct of Magistrates towards their Subjects. And for these Purposes the Precepts of Scripture are admirably useful. That excellent Passage of the Apostle *Paul*, *Rom. 13. 1, &c.* if duly observed, would make good Magistrates and dutiful Subjects. It settles the Obedience and Duty of Subjects on the proper Foundation, and secures it by the best Motives; at the same time it points to the true End and Design of Magistracy. And how happy would it be if Magistrates would regard themselves as the Ministers of the supreme Being, the most wise and righteous Governor of the World, appointed for this very Purpose, to give Encouragement to Virtue, and to discountenance and punish Vice and Evil-doers? Those that have a mind to see how full the Scripture is on this Head, and what a variety of excellent Precepts are there given, with relation to the Duties of Magistrates and Subjects, every way sufficient, if duly attended to, to preserve the good Order and Welfare of Society, may, besides the Passage now mentioned, consult those referr'd to in the bottom of the Page*.

Another Instance this Writer mentions, is that Passage where we are commanded to *render to all Men*

* Deut. 1. 13, 15, 16, 17. 2 Chron. 19. 6, 7. Ps. 82. 1, 2, 3, 4. 101. 3. 2 Sam. 23. 3. Prov. 20. 8, 26, 28. 29. 2, 3, 12. 14, 26. 31. 4, 5. Eccles. 5. 8. 1 Tim. 2. 1, 2. Tit. 3. 1. 1 Pet. 2. 13, 14, 15. Acts 5. 27, 28, 29.

Men their Dues; “but, says he, what those Dues
 “are, we are to learn from the Reason of Things,
 “and the Laws of the Country, *ibid.*” But the
 Scripture does not leave us merely to this general
 Account. It abounds with the most excellent Di-
 rections, that instruct Men how to behave towards
 their Superiors, Inferiors, or Equals, towards their
 Friends, and even towards their Enemies them-
 selves. There is scarce any Office of Humanity,
 Justice, or Charity, due from one Man to another,
 but is clearly describ’d, the several Relations are
 mention’d, Persons are urged to the Duties that
 are correspondent to those Relations; and these
 are enforced by the most powerful Motives, and
 by the Authority of God himself; and therefore
 must have infinitely greater Force, than merely
 the Reasoning of Moralists on these Heads. Upon
 the whole, the Scripture-Precepts are sufficient to
 direct every sincere impartial Inquirer that is will-
 ing to know and practise his Duty; and if fol-
 low’d, would make the World easy and happy,
 and promote the Peace and Order of Nations, Fa-
 milies and particular Persons. And they are as
 particular and distinct as could reasonably be ex-
 pected in a Body of Laws design’d for the use of
 Mankind; and to have descended to more minute
 Particularities, would, by rendering it more volu-
 minous, make it less useful.

But after all, it is with a very ill Grace, that this
 Gentleman complains of the Rules and Precepts
 of Scripture, for being too general and indetermi-
 nate, when those he advances in their stead, and
 the Usefulness of which he so much extols, are far
 more loose and general and undetermin’d.

He boasts mightily of his Rule of judging of
 Actions by their Tendency. But that which he
 offers to prove the Excellency and Advantages of
 this Rule, *viz.* that it takes in all Cases, and ad-
 mits

mits of no Exceptions, only proves, that it is very general and undetermin'd. What can be more general than the *standing Rule* he talks of, p. 18, 19*, and which he supposes capable to direct us in all Cases, viz. *that whatever Circumstances Men are plac'd in by God, it is his Will they should act as these Circumstances require?* or than that other Rule, p. 17†. that a Man must *so regulate his natural Appetites, as will most conduce to the Exercise of his Reason, the Health of his Body, and the Pleasure of the Senses taken and consider'd together?* 'Tis evident these Rules are loose, indeterminate, and give very little Direction. And it is probable, as I have already observed, Part I. p. 203. that whatever is pretended, the true ground of the Quarrel that many have with the Laws of the Gospel, is not for being too general and undetermin'd, but for being too close and particular, and expressly determining our Duty in many Cases, which these Gentlemen would rather have left at large.

I think I may safely leave it to any Man of common Understanding, that considers these Rules of our Author, and the general Summaries he gives us of our Duty in his second Chapter, p. 16, 17, 18‡. and in his thirteenth Chapter, p. 280, 281§. whether it would be more for the Good of Mankind, and enlighten and direct them better in their Duty, to leave them merely to gather it from such Descriptions, than which nothing can be more general and undetermin'd; or from the sacred Writings, which so particularly describe, not in a single Passage, but in many Passages, the several Duties incumbent upon us with regard to God, our Neighbours, and our selves, and give us particular Directions how to behave in the several Conditions and Relations we are under, and inforce them in the strongest manner, by the highest Authority and most powerful Motives?

There

* P. 16. † P. 14. ‡ P. 14, 15, 16. § P. 252, 253.

There is another Objection which this Writer seems to lay a considerable Stress upon, to shew that the Scripture is obscure and of no use to direct us in our Duty. He observes in several places, “ that the Scripture contains some Precepts which “ are occasional, obliging only certain Persons “ upon certain Occasions and in certain Circumstances; and others that are of an eternal Obligation; and makes no distinction in delivering them; and that therefore Men, even the most “ Learned, have no other way of knowing the one “ from the other, but from the Nature of the “ Precepts or the eternal Reason of Things.” And again, p. 431 *. that “ all Precepts occasional and “ perpetual are alike commanded in Scripture, “ without making any difference: No Precepts “ being said to bind all Mankind, or to bind any “ for ever, except those relating to the *Jewish* “ Economy; which in an hundred places, we “ are told, are to last for ever.”

But the very Instance he mentions proves the contrary of what he intends. For it is sufficiently evident from Scripture itself, that the *Jewish* Precepts were not design’d to be of perpetual Observation, or to bind all Mankind. They were most of them by their original Institution confin’d to the Land of *Canaan*, and to the Tabernacle or Temple there; which shew’d they were never design’d to be universally and perpetually obligatory. Besides, that in several Passages of the Prophets it is plainly enough declar’d, that the particular Economy which *Moses* introduced should be abolish’d and give way to a more perfect Dispensation, which is accordingly accomplish’d in the New Testament. As to his Remark concerning the *Mosaical* Ordinances being said to be *for ever*, this Author himself elsewhere observes, that “ sometimes a short “ Dura-

* P. 390.

“ Duration is expressed in Scripture by the words
“ *for ever*, as appears, he says, from a hundred
“ Texts, p. 336 *”. And indeed it cannot be deny’d, that the *Hebrew* word, *Olam*, which we render *for ever*, is often used to signify a limited Duration. It appears then that if the Scripture had declared that such or such Precepts were of perpetual Obligation (which yet the Author blames it for not doing) he would have still made the same Objection. But the truth is, there is no need at all for any express Declaration of this kind. When the Precepts are occasional and temporary, the Scripture itself gives us sufficient Marks to shew that they are so; and on the other hand, there are Precepts, the universal Necessity and Importance of which is there frequently inculcated, and in the strongest manner. And what these are, any Man of a common Capacity may know, that diligently reads and considers the sacred Writings.

Our Author, with a View to shew that we cannot learn from Scripture alone what Precepts are obligatory and what not, is pleased to produce some Instances of Things expressly commanded in Scripture, which yet have been neglected by the Generality of Christians, because they judged from the Tendency of Things, that those Commands were not obligatory, as being in themselves unfit and unreasonable, and contrary to the Good of Mankind. He instances in the Command forbidding Usury, and the eating things strangled, and Blood, and in the Command of washing one another’s Feet, and not swearing at all, p. 345, 346 †. But not one of these Instances is to his purpose. If Christians now generally do not think all Usury unlawful, it is not that they look upon all Usury to be forbidden by the express Command of Scripture, and yet don’t think that Command obligatory,

* P. 304.

† P. 313, 314.

tory, (as this Gentleman represents it) but because they look upon it not to be forbidden. They think they can prove, that it was never absolutely and universally forbidden even under the Old Testament; since it was only forbidden to the *Jews* towards one another for some special Reasons, (and indeed as they were not a trading Nation, they had little need of it among themselves) but they were allowed to lend upon Usury to the Gentiles, which they would not have been allowed to do if it had been in itself unlawful, any more than they were allowed to rob and to defraud the Gentiles. Nor can it be proved, that all Usury is any where forbidden under the New Testament. And as to what he talks of the *unanimous Consent of all the Fathers*, *Grotius in Luc. 6. 35.* observes, that it was not absolutely and universally forbidden in the strictest Times of the Christian Church, though it was not allowed to the Clergy, whom they would have to abstain from all Appearances of Evil.

The Author next mentions the *eating of Blood*, which he represents as absolutely and universally forbidden in Scripture; *and yet who is so ridiculous, as out of Religion to abstain from Black-Puddings?* 'Tis easy to answer, that all those Christians abstain from eating Blood, who think it is forbidden in Scripture. Nor can I see where would be the great Hurt to Society, if there were no Black-Puddings eaten. And perhaps if this Gentleman, who makes himself so merry on this Subject, were to argue the Case merely from what he calls the Reason and Nature of Things, he would not find it so very easy to produce any Warrant from the Law of Nature for eating either the Blood or Flesh of Animals; nor would be able to remove the Scruples, or answer the Objections, which some of the most celebrated ancient Philosophers (who profess'd as well as he to be governed by the Nature and Reason

Reason of Things) raised on this Head. Those that believe the Scripture go upon sure Grounds in eating Flesh, because they have an express divine Allowance for it. And if the Generality of Christians allow themselves also to eat Things strangled and Blood, it is not that they look upon it to be forbidden them in Scripture, and yet do not think that Command to be obligatory, as thinking it in it self unreasonable, (as this Author would make his Readers believe) but it is because they think they can prove from Scripture it self, that the eating Blood, though forbidden under the Law of *Moses* for Reasons proper to that Dispensation, is not universally and perpetually forbidden under the Gospel. The Command given to *Noah* (mentioned by the Author) relates in the Opinion of the *Jews* themselves to the eating of any Member, or the Flesh of any Animal taken from it alive, or eating it raw with the Blood warm and reeking in it, and this best answers the Import of the *Hebrew* Words; a very proper Command to be then given, when Men were first allowed to eat Flesh, that they should not prey upon it as the Brutes, &c. And as to the Apostolical Decree, forbidding *Things strangled* and *Blood*, they think they can prove that that Command was but temporary, and for particular Reasons for the Time then present, to avoid Scandal and Offence, and was never designed to be universally and perpetually obligatory: Because it appears from several other express Passages, that the Gospel intirely takes away all Distinction of Meats; that no kind of Meat is now to be regarded as *unclean*, but that *every Creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused if received with Thanksgiving*; and that we are allowed to *eat whatsoever is sold in the Shambles, asking no Questions for Conscience-sake*. And our Saviour himself expressly declares, that

nothing that enters into the Mouth of a Man defiles a Man. As to Fornication, which is mentioned in the same Decree, it is not prohibited only in that Decree, (in which case it might be contested whether it was designed to be universally and perpetually forbidden) but in many other express Passages of Scripture, and that in the strongest manner, and under pain of Damnation, and upon Reasons that plainly are of perpetual Obligation; see *1 Cor.* 6. 9, 10, 13, 20. *Gal.* 5. 19, 21. *Col.* 3. 5, 6. *Hebr.* 13. 4. Nor is there any one Passage in Scripture to qualify and limit these, as there are in the other Case. So that here by the way is an Instance where the Scripture it self plainly leads us to distinguish between Commands that are occasional and temporary, and those that are of perpetual Obligation.

The next Instance this Gentleman produces, which relates to the Command of washing one another's Feet, is not more to his purpose. If Christians do not think themselves obliged to observe the Ceremony of washing one another's Feet, it is because they think that all that Christ intended in washing his Disciples Feet, was only to set before them an Example of Humility and Condescension; and that when he urges them to imitate him in this, the plain Meaning of it is no more, than that they should be ready to serve and assist one another in all mutual good Offices, and kind and obliging Condescensions; and that since he their Lord and Master stooped to such a servile Office towards them, they should not think any friendly Office towards one another beneath them, though seemingly as mean as this might appear to be. This is the evident Meaning of the whole Action, and interpreted by our Lord himself in so plain a manner, that scarce any one can mistake it. And accordingly in fact it has been always so understood

stood by Christians; and I believe any Man of common Understanding, upon reading it without an Instructor, would not form any other Notion of it.

As to the last Instance he mentions, relating to the Command of not swearing; I shall only observe, that those Christians that think all swearing is forbidden in Scripture, do accordingly look upon it to be unlawful; and if the Generality of Christians think it lawful to swear on some solemn Occasions; 'tis because they think the Scripture it self leads them to interpret it so; as has been hinted above, p. 203.

Thus we see all the Author's Instances have failed him; whereby he pretended to shew, that there are several Things expressly and solemnly commanded in Scripture, which yet Christians have generally neglected; because they judg'd from the Tendency of Things, that those Commands were not obligatory; and that consequently the Scripture it self is of no Use to direct us in our Duty, or to shew us what Commands are obligatory, and what not.

The last Thing which I shall take notice of, and which the Author very much insists upon to shew the Obscurity and Uncertainty of the sacred Writings, is the many Divisions that have been and are among Christians about the Sense of Scripture. This is a darling Topick on which he often declaims; especially in his 13th Chapter. He seems to triumph in the Argument, as if he thought it unanswerable, and yet nothing can be more weak. For it must depend upon this Principle, that every thing about which there have been Controversies and Disputes is in it self uncertain and obscure. A Principle manifestly false and absurd, and which would prove that there is nothing clear and certain in Nature. And if this Writer had

that Regard for natural Religion which he every where professes, he would be cautious of advancing Arguments, which in their Consequences bear as hard upon natural Religion as upon revealed, and have no other Tendency but to promote universal Scepticism.

Among many Passages in this Author relating to the Uncertainty of the Sense of Scripture-Texts, and the great Difference among Christians about the Interpretation of them, there is one which I shall particularly take notice of. It is in p. 240*. where he tells us, “ That he might demonstrate, “ were it not endless to go through Particulars, “ that there’s scarce a Text, except in Things of “ their own Nature evident, where Commenta- “ tors do not differ.” And then saith, “ Whe- “ ther these Considerations alone be not a suffi- “ cient Reason for the Unlearned to adhere to “ those plain simple Truths the Light of Nature “ dictates, I leave you to judge.”

But what does this Gentleman mean by *Things of their own Nature evident*? I suppose he means the Principles of natural Religion, or, as he expresses it, *those plain simple Truths the Light of Nature dictates*. But if it be a Proof that Things are not of their own Nature evident, that Men, yea and those pretending to Reason and Learning too, differ about them, ’tis plain that even the Being of a God, a Providence, the natural Differences of Good and Evil, Man’s Free-agency, the Immortality of the Soul, and a State of future Retributions, which I think may be esteemed amongst the chief Principles of natural Religion, are not evident. But if the Philosophers differing about these and other important Points of natural Religion, be no Argument that they are in themselves uncertain and obscure, why should Commentators differing

* P. 215, 216.

differing about the Sense of Texts of Scripture be an Argument of the Obscurity of the Scripture? I am persuaded, that take the plainest Book in the World, and set a great number of Criticks and Commentators to work upon it, especially if we suppose a Succession of them employed about it for several hundred Years, (as has been in fact the Case with regard to the Bible) 'tis impossible but there must be great Variety. 'Tis hard if in so great a number there be not still found some or other, that from an Affectation of saying something that has not been said before, or from several other Causes, will refine upon and thereby perplex the plainest Passages. But this does not prove them to be of themselves uncertain and obscure. Why should the Whim or odd Fancy of a single Commentator be regarded, or create any Difficulty, when the general Stream of Expositors, and the plain Meaning of the Text it self, lies another way? But after all, this Author unreasonably magnifies the Differences among Expositors, when he says, *there is scarce a Text, except in Things of their own Nature evident, where Commentators do not differ.* There is a vast number of Texts, in the Sense of which there is a general Concurrence among Expositors. And in many of those Texts where there appears to be a Variety among them, there is no real Difference. They agree in the general Design and Meaning of the Passage, though one perhaps considers it more fully than another, and offers something to illustrate it which another had not observed. And this every one knows, that is at all acquainted with the Criticks on the Bible.

Those of the common People that have no Opportunity of consulting many Commentators, may of themselves, by seriously reading and considering the Scripture, and comparing one Part of it

with another, come to form a sufficient Notion of the main Doctrines and Principles as well as Precepts of Christianity. There is indeed no great need of Skill in Criticism to judge of these, which depend not on any single Passage, but on many Passages, and the general Scope of the New Testament. And if there be several Texts which they don't well know the Meaning of, for want of those Helps which the Learned enjoy, there are still many Parts of Scripture sufficiently plain and obvious, from which they may easily know all that is necessary for them, whether for Faith or Practice.

But our Author urges, that "the Difficulty is
"to know which are the plain Texts, since the
"different Sects of Christians in their several Dis-
"putes, have ever pretended that the plainest
"Texts are for them;" of which he gives some Instances which I need not repeat, p. 325, 326*. To shew the Fallacy of this Argument, let it be considered, that in the several Disputes and Controversies of all kinds that have been and are managed in the World, the several Parties pretend that *plain Reason* is on their side. But does it follow, that therefore there is no such thing as *plain Reason*, or that a Man of common Capacity cannot understand what is plain Reason when it is clearly set before him? As little does it follow, that there are no such things as *plain Texts of Scripture*, because those of different Parties pretend the *plain Texts* are for them. If therefore it be ask'd, How shall we know what Texts of Scripture are plain? I answer, the People may come to know this, as they may come to know that any Passage in any Book whatsoever is plain, or as they may come to know that a Reason or Argument is plain, by common Sense and Attention.

And it is the peculiar Advantage of the Scripture, that Things of any Consequence are to be found there, not merely in a single Passage, but in many Passages, frequently repeated in various Expressions and various Views; by considering and comparing which, a Man of ordinary Understanding that brings a sincere and honest and attentive Mind, may come to a sufficient Certainty about them, without troubling himself much to inquire into the several Opinions of Criticks and Commentators.

But our Author asks, “ Whether the common
“ People, who understand not a Word of the
“ Language, can be better Judges than the *Jews*
“ themselves of the Meaning of their own Books,
“ and their own Prophets speaking to them in
“ their own Language? p. 237*. I answer, that
an honest Christian that diligently reads the Scriptures, may come to a sufficient Assurance, both that there was a glorious Saviour promised in the Old Testament, and that Jesus Christ is he. It needs no great Skill in Criticism to know, that the Time prefixed in the Prophets for the coming of the Messiah is long since elaps’d, which was to be under the second Temple, and before the utter Destruction of the Jewish Polity. Or that the 53d Chapter of *Isaiah* can’t be interpreted of *Jeremiah*, or of the People of *Israel*, but was exactly fulfilled in Jesus Christ; in whom the several Characters of the promised Redeemer wonderfully meet. These Things any honest Christian, that diligently reads and considers the Scripture, may know with Certainty enough to yield him a sufficient Satisfaction; though perhaps he may not be able to solve every Cavil a subtil Critick may advance to the contrary; as a Man may believe a God and a Providence, though unable to answer all the Cavils

an atheistical Wit may bring against them. But besides this, there have been many excellent Writings publish'd by learned Christians, who have understood the *Hebrew* Language as well as the *Jews* themselves, and have demonstrated with great Evidence, that the Interpretations the modern *Jews* have invented to shun the Force of the Old Testament Prophecies, are both inconsistent with the manifest Design of the Words themselves, and contrary to the Sense of their own most ancient and approved Writers. And by consulting these Writings, even those that do not understand the original *Hebrew* may come to a sufficient Satisfaction, both about the Jewish Objections and the proper Answers to them.

I need not take particular notice of what the Author offers and frequently repeats, p. 243. and elsewhere, that *Christians are endlessly divided even in what they call Fundamentals*: for not to urge, that it is certain that the Generality of Christians in all Ages have agreed in the principal Articles of the Christian Faith, as deliver'd in what is commonly call'd the Apostles Creed; besides this, I say, it is easy to shew, that there must be Fundamentals in natural as well as reveal'd Religion; that there have been great Divisions about the one as well as the other; and that therefore no Argument can be brought to prove the Obscurity of the Scriptures from the Divisions of Christians about their supposed Fundamentals, but what will equally hold against the Clearness of the Law of Nature, and the Certainty even of the main Principles of natural Religion. But the truth is, the Argument is false and sophistical, when applied to either; since it depends upon a Principle which is manifestly false, *viz.* that every thing about which Men have been divided in their Sentiments is uncertain and obscure. But this Objection has been con-

Christianity as Old as the Creation. 265
consider'd, Vol. I. Chap. 11. to which I must refer the Reader.

That is of no great Consequence which he observes, p. 238 *. concerning the distinguishing Doctrines or Tenets of the several Churches among Christians, of which the common People are incapable of judging. Many of these Tenets relate to things which the People may very safely be ignorant of. Most of the Controversies among professed Christians have been owing not to their adhering too closely to the sacred Writings, but to their departing from the Simplicity of the Scriptures, and advancing new Inventions or Traditions of their own, which have little or no Foundation there. The common People need not much concern themselves, what this or that Set of Men hold; give them the Scriptures, let them study the Bible, and draw their Religion from thence, they are safe, whether they know these other things or not. This will furnish them with a sufficient Antidote against any Doctrines advanced by any Set of Men whatsoever, for which there is no Foundation in the Holy Scriptures, and especially if they be contrary to what is there plainly revealed. This is the case with respect to many of the Doctrines of Popery. Leave the common People to read and study the Bible, they will easily discover of themselves, that those Tenets are false and unscriptural. It was reading the Bible that produced the Reformation, and brought the People to a just Sense of Truth and Liberty. And indeed the common People often pass a truer Judgment on the Sense of Scripture than the Learned, as they have less Interest or Passion to mislead them; and common Sense, or natural Judgment join'd with an honest teachable Mind, and a diligent reading the Scripture, and considering the main Scope of it,

* P. 215.

it, is usually a much better Guide, than a subtle trifling Criticism that plays upon Words, and hunts after all their possible Significations, in order to find out a Meaning that may be agreeable to a darling Hypothesis, which they come with an obstinate Resolution to defend. And generally speaking, with relation to those Passages of Scripture, that deliver the main Doctrines or Precepts of Religion, the most obvious Meaning, and that which naturally presents itself to a diligent honest Reader, is the true one, and far more to be depended on than those Interpretations that cannot be found out without a curious Criticism, and a great deal of Subtlety.

Upon the whole, after all that the Author has so laboriously offer'd to prove the Obscurity of the Scriptures, I am willing to put the Question to this Issue; Whether it be better for the People, in order to their forming just Notions of Religion and their Duty, to be left merely to what he calls the *plain simple Dictates of the Light of Nature*, or to have the Scripture put into their hands? Let us put the case, that of two Men of equal natural Capacity, and equal Diligence, one is left to gather the Principles of his Religion and his Duty merely by the Force of his own Reason and Judgment from the Book of Nature, which the Author represents as so very easy and legible to the whole World, without being sophisticated by the Instructions of any Teacher; and let us suppose the other to have the Scripture, (which this Writer represents as so obscure a Book) even with all the Disadvantages of a Translation, put into his hands, and that without the Aid of Expofitor or Commentator. I think I may leave it to any Man to judge whether the latter would not have far juster Notions of God and of his glorious Attributes and Perfections, and his most wise and righteous Providence;

vidence ; a deeper Sense of the Evil of Sin, and the Beauty and Excellency of real Holiness ; and more distinct Apprehensions of the Duties he owes to God, his Fellow-Creatures, and himself ; and a more firm Belief of the Immortality of the Soul, and a State of future Rewards and Punishments : I say, I think I may leave it to any Man to judge, whether the latter would not have far clearer and juster Notions of these Things, and a far greater Certainty about them than the former ; not to mention other things, which depending on the free Counsels of the Deity, we could not pretend certainly to know without an express Revelation of the divine Will.

It is indeed hard to conceive a more easy and certain and compendious way by which the People may attain to a right Knowledge of Religion, than by the Help of a written Revelation. They have only to consider this Revelation, and judge of the Sense of it as they do of the Sense of any other Book, by the common Meaning of Words, by the Scope and Connection, and by comparing one part of this Revelation with another. This reduces their Work into a far narrower Compass, and at the same time gives them far more Satisfaction and Certainty, than if they were left merely to work out a Scheme of Principles for themselves by the Strength of their own Reason, or were to attend to the long and subtle Reasonings of the Philosophers. And accordingly we find in fact, that notwithstanding the pretended Obscurity of the Scriptures, the great Truths and Principles even of natural Religion are far more universally known and acknowledged amongst Christians that govern themselves by the Scriptures, than ever they were amongst the most enlightened Pagan Nations, even in the politest Ages of *Greece* and *Rome*, though assisted by the Instructions of the Philosophers. And amongst
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Christians 'tis undeniably manifest, that those that have the freest Access to the Scriptures, and search them with the greatest Diligence, and are most careful to take their Religion from thence, are always the most knowing and intelligent, and have the best Notions of Religion and their Duty.

Before I leave this Subject, I shall take some notice of what this Writer offers to shew, that if Revelation be admitted, such are the Obscurities that attend it, as must infer the Necessity of an infallible Guide. P. 299, 300*. as he elsewhere represents the Popish Argument for oral Tradition, to be all that can be advanced for the Truth of Christianity, so here he plainly insinuates, that there is no way of answering their Arguments for an infallible Judge, but by renouncing all *traditional Religion*, as he calls it, that is, renouncing Christianity itself; and that (as he introduces the Papists saying) *there is no Mean between Popery and natural Religion*. The Substance of the Argument, as he urges it, is this; “ Since the Ignorant and
 “ Illiterate are incapable of understanding Books
 “ written in antiquated Languages, or of judging
 “ of the historical Evidence of remote Facts, on
 “ which the Authority of those Books is founded;
 “ especially considering that the historical Evidence
 “ is lost but of one side only, and that too they
 “ understand not; and that Christians in the ear-
 “ liest Times were split into many Sects, and each
 “ Sect had their particular Scriptures; since they
 “ cannot know whether a Religion thus founded,
 “ has been faithfully convey'd to them; since they
 “ are incapable of judging in the Controversies
 “ about the Number of canonical Books, oral Tra-
 “ dition, the Authority of the Church, the unin-
 “ terrupted Succession, and a thousand other
 “ Things, especially such as relate to Mysteries,
 “ and

* P. 271, 272.

“ and about which they are so far from being
“ competent Judges, that they are not capable
“ of understanding even the Terms made use of
“ by the Learned to explain them ; must there
“ not be some Persons appointed to judge for them
“ in Matters of Religion; in whose Determina-
“ tion they may safely acquiesce?”

I would remark here, that the Arguments he puts into the Mouths of the Papists, and which it must be owned, they have often made use of with a View to prove that the Scriptures are not the Rule of Faith, are the same that he himself produces against the divine Authority of the Scriptures. From whence I think it is a just Inference, that in the present Argument, the Cause of Christianity and of Protestantism is the same; and that whatever proves the Christian Revelation against the Infidel, does equally prove the Truth of the Protestant Religion (the fundamental Principle of which is, that the Scriptures are the Rule of Faith) against the Papists. The same Answer will serve to both, and in opposition to both it may be shewn, that the common People, with that degree of Sagacity and Attention which they often bestow upon Things of far less consequence, may judge for themselves, both of the Evidences of the Christian Revelation in general, and of the Sense of that Revelation as far as it is necessary for them to know it.

As to the internal Evidences of Christianity, arising from the Purity of the Precepts, the excellent Tendency of the Doctrines, their having no Marks of Worldliness or Imposture, &c. Of these the common People that diligently read and study the sacred Writings may judge as well as the Learned. It carries (to use the Author's Expressions) *such internal Marks of its Truth, as Men of mean Capacities*

eties are able to discover. He asks, p. 280. can't the common People tell, what Sentiments inspire them with Love and Reverence for the Deity? And need they much Reflection to know, that the more any Sentiments do this, the more they ought to be cherished? When therefore they feel the happy Influence of the Doctrines of the Gospel upon their own Souls, for inspiring them with Love to God, and an Admiration of his rich Grace and Mercy, and for impressing them with a Veneration and Dread of his Holiness and Justice; when they feel the mighty Power of its Arguments and Motives for engaging them to the Love and Practice of universal Righteousness, Piety and Charity; this may furnish them with a strong internal Argument or Conviction that the Christian Revelation is from God; they may then be said, to have the *Witness within* them that the Gospel is true; especially if to this it be added, that it may be justly expected that God will assist such honest Inquirers, and that he has promised to do so by his Divine Spirit. And this I hope will to the generality of serious Christians be an effectual Security against the Author's Principles, though they may not be able distinctly to answer all his Cavils.*

And though he represents them as incapable of judging of the historical Evidence of remote Facts, on which the Authority of those Books is founded, by which I suppose he means the extraordinary miraculous Attestations, whereby our Saviour's Mission and the Gospel-Revelation stands confirmed; yet 'tis certain, that those of an ordinary Understanding may easily have sufficient Evidence to satisfy any reasonable Inquirer, both that these Facts come to us transmitted in authentick Records, written by Persons who were themselves Eye-witnesses of them, and than whom, all things considered,

dered, there never were more credible Witnesses, and that these Records are transmitted to us pure and uncorrupted in all the main Facts and Doctrines. This may be proved by Arguments, of the Strength of which the Unlearned themselves may easily judge, as has been already shewn, and which indeed require far less Attention and Abstraction than to judge of the various Disputes of Philosophers about the Reasons and Principles of Things.

Our Author, to heighten the Difficulty, supposes that the historical Evidence is lost, but of one side; and if it be lost, the Learned can judge of it no more than the Unlearned; nor would an infallible Judge help them to judge of Evidence where there is none. But how does it appear that there was Evidence on the other side against the Facts of the Gospel? Is there any Account that ever there was such Evidence? If not, it is a Dream of his own without any Foundation to support it. When he adds, as what makes it still more difficult to the Unlearned to judge in this Matter, that *Christians in the earliest Times were split into many Sects, and each Sect had their peculiar Scriptures*; I ask, how can the Unlearned know, that there were Sects of Christians in the primitive Times, that had their peculiar Scriptures? By the same Means that they come to know this, they may also know that there was a general Consent among the primitive Christians all over the World, in receiving the four Gospels and *Paul's Epistles*; and that though there were some Persons and some Sects that endeavoured to corrupt the genuine Writings of the Apostles, or to impose spurious Writings upon the World in their Names, yet the Forgery was immediately detected; they never had it in their power to cause them to be generally received; nor indeed were those Sects that received them regarded

ed as belonging to the Christian Church; and accordingly both they and their Forgeries soon died, and the most of them were scarce heard of any more.

As to the Controversies about the Number of canonical Books, which the Author also mentions, since he supposes the Unlearned to be acquainted with the Objections, (which yet they can't know without Information) they may in the same way be acquainted with the Answers, and easily form a Judgment upon comparing them. And if they be capable of knowing the one though unlearned, why not equally capable of knowing the other too?

Though the Unlearned are *not capable of understanding Books written in antiquated Languages*, in the Originals, yet they may understand them in the Translations; and how far these may be depended on, has been sufficiently shewn above, p. 175, & *seq.* I don't think the People need concern themselves much in the Controversies about *the uninterrupted Succession*, except it can be proved from Scripture or Reason, that an uninterrupted Succession is necessary; and of this I apprehend the People may without much difficulty judge. With respect to the Questions about *Oral Tradition*, and the *Authority of the Church*, if they be well acquainted with the Scriptures, this will enable them to form a right Judgment concerning these Things, and sufficiently preserve them from being imposed upon. And as to *Mysteries*, the People may also know all that is necessary for them to know concerning them from the Scripture, without the Help of an infallible Interpreter. And it will be no Loss to them if they *do not understand*, or do not concern themselves much about *the Terms made use of by the Learned to explain them*, who would have done better if they had kept close to the Simplicity of the Scriptures, and not pretended to be wise above what is written.

Upon

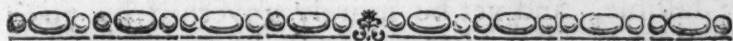
Upon the whole, all that can be justly gathered from the Difficulties mentioned by this Writer is, that Care and Attention is necessary, which will be easily granted. But I don't see, but that the Argument for the Expediency of an infallible Guide would hold as good in natural as in revealed Religion; since Errors in the former are at least as dangerous as those in the latter; and it appears from the Experience and Observation of all Ages; that People are liable to fall into Errors with respect to the Principles of the one as well as the other. It might be said; that the illiterate Vulgar were incapable of judging of the several Disputes of the Philosophers, about the Reasons and Principles of Things; that therefore an infinitely wise and good Being would certainly provide a living infallible Judge of Controversies. I own this is a fallacious way of arguing. It is plain there is no such living Judge in the one Case, and as plain there is none in the other; and those that pretend there is one, have never yet been able to determine where or who he is.

Indeed as to Matter of Fact it cannot be denied, that the Vulgar almost every where take their Religion upon trust. And though this Writer always distinguishes traditional Religion from natural, yet 'tis certain the Knowledge they have even of natural Religion is for the most part every where traditional: And the Vulgar adopt that Scheme of it that prevails in their respective Countries. If there were none to instruct them at all, it is to be feared they would labour under an universal Ignorance even of the main Principles of natural Religion, and degenerate into downright Barbarism; and if there were Teachers, the Vulgar would be apt to give themselves no further Trouble, but take the Account they gave them, rather than be at the pains of laborious Disquisitions.

tions into the Nature and Reason of Things, relating to the Providence and Attributes of God, the Differences between Good and Evil, the Immortality of the Soul, and a State of future Retributions. But if we suppose the great Principles and Duties of Religion plainly laid before them in a written divine Revelation, this seems to be the best Method that can be contrived for instructing the Bulk of Mankind, and enabling them to judge for themselves, and understand their own Religion. This is the best Security against the Impositions of designing Men, and to prevent their yielding a blind Submission, which is ever the inseparable Effect of Darkness and Ignorance*.

Even those of the People that can't read their Mother-Tongue, would much more easily come to the Knowledge of Religion by the help of such a Revelation than without it. If they can't read it themselves, they may hear it read by others, and supposing no natural Defect in their Understandings, and that they know the plain Meaning of Words, they might by this means obtain such Notions of Religion, as might enable them to judge for themselves, and prevent their being imposed upon in Matters of Importance. So at the time of the Reformation there were many that could not read, that yet by having the Scriptures read to them, and taking pains to be informed, were rescued from the Errors of Popery, and from the Tyranny and Imposition of their false Guides. And I my self have known Persons that could not read, that yet by such Means as these have obtained a good Notion of Christianity, such as was sufficient both to influence their own Practice, and to secure them from dangerous Errors.

* See more on this Subject, *Part I. Chap. IX.*



C H A P. XI.

A Consideration of those Passages of Scripture, which the Author alledges tend to lead the Vulgar to form wrong Apprehensions of the Deity: That the Scripture it self sufficiently secures every honest and attentive Reader from such Misapprehensions; and that there is no Necessity to put a Constraint and Force upon it to render it agreeable to Reason.

HAVING fully considered what the Author offers to shew that the Scripture is uncertain and obscure, I now proceed according to the Method proposed to consider the second Class of Objections; the Design of which is to prove, that the Scripture contains many Things in it altogether unworthy of God, and contrary to Reason and the Law of Nature; and that instead of being of Use to direct the People in the Knowledge of God and of their Duty, it tends rather to pervert and mislead them in Matters of great Consequence to Faith and Practice. And if the Author could prove this, it must be own'd that he would gain his Point; which is to shew, that the Scriptures are not a true divine Revelation.

In several Passages of his 12th and 13th Chapters he supposes and asserts, that the plain natural Sense of Scripture is injurious to God, and derogatory to his Perfections; and that Interpreters are obliged to force a Sense upon it, for which there is no Foundation in the Scripture it self, to make it agreeable to Reason. And then observes,

that “ there is no Book but you may own it in-
 “ fallible, and yet be intirely governed by your
 “ Reason, if as often as you find any thing not a-
 “ greeable to your Reason, you torture it to make
 “ it speak what is so, p. 202 *.” To the same pur-
 pose he represents it as owned by all Divines, that
the Scripture taken literally (that is, as he interprets
 it, in the plain obvious Meaning) *gives the Vulgar*
false and unworthy Notions of the divine Nature,
 p. 205 †. But this is far from being a fair Repre-
 sentation. On the contrary, it is certain that tho’
 some particular Passages considered abstractedly
 from the rest, and without making any Allowance
 for the figurative Manner of Expression, might do
 so; yet if we take the whole Scripture-Revelation
 together, and understand it in the most plain and
 obvious Sense of the Words, it tends to furnish
 Men with the most worthy Conceptions of the
 Deity. There are so many express and formal
 Passages in which we have the noblest Descrip-
 tions of the divine Nature and Perfections, as
 will effectually secure any honest and attentive
 Reader, that has a sincere Desire to govern him-
 self by the sacred Writings, from taking those o-
 ther Passages in a wrong Sense. And in the sever-
 al Instances produced by the Author, it may be
 easily shewn, that that Sense which is most agree-
 able to Reason, it also most agreeable to Scripture
 too; that it is not a forced unnatural Interpreta-
 tion of the Words, but what the Scripture it self
 naturally points out to the diligent and honest
 Reader; and the contrary absurd Sense which this
 Writer would put upon those Passages, is as con-
 trary to Scripture as it is to Reason, and what no
 Man of common Understanding that carefully
 reads the Scripture, and takes his Notions of Re-
 ligion from thence, is in danger of admitting. If
 this

* P. 178.

† P. 181.

this can be shewn, the Author's Argument intirely falls. And here, that I may give him all the Advantage he can desire, I shall not have recourse to curious Criticisms on the Meaning of the original Words, (which he might pretend the People are unacquainted with) but shall take the several Passages he produces as they are in our own Translation, though in some of the Instances he mentions his Objection is wholly founded on a wrong or imperfect Translation.

After having with great Pomp produced some Quotations, to shew that we are not to admit any thing as a Revelation from God, that contradicts the evident Dictates of Reason, or subverts the Principles and Obligations of the Law of Nature; he proceeds, p. 250*, &c. to apply this to the Scriptures. And the first Instance he thinks fit to mention is, that "God is frequently said to swear; nay, in both Old and New Testament, to swear in Wrath, Pl. 95. 11. Heb. 3. 11." And he thinks "it is repugnant to the natural Notion we have of God to suppose, that God who has no Superior can swear at all, much less be in a Passion, and swear in Wrath."

But the Scripture it self sufficiently obviates the Author's first Exception, by expressly declaring, that Men verily swear by a greater, but that God having no greater to swear by, swears by himself; see that admirable Passage, *Hebr. 6. 16, 17, 18.* A grand and sublime Representation! according to which, God is introduced as assuring us by his own Deity, and by his own glorious Perfections, of the performance of his Word. As little Foundation is there for his other Reflection, that God is represented as *swearing in a Passion*; for so he interprets his *swearing in Wrath*; when every common Reader that is acquainted with the Scrip-

tures knows that the Wrath of God is only a strong Expression to signify his righteous Displeasure against Sin; and particularly in the Passage the Author refers to, *Pf. 95. 11.* all that can be understood by God's swearing in Wrath is, that in a just Displeasure against their obstinate Unbelief, their Disobedience and Ingratitude, after having long borne with their Provocations, he declared with the greatest Solemnity, and in a manner that shewed the Irrevocableness of his Decree, that they should not enter into his Rest.

We need not concern our selves much about the Author's next Instance, which depends wholly on his own Misrepresentation; he would have it thought that there are many Texts of Scripture, that represent God as *damning* the Heathens for *Impossibilities*, that is, for not believing in Christ whom they never heard of; whereas the Scripture plainly declares, that they shall be tried by the Law of Nature, and shall be condemned for not living up to that Law, *Rom. 2. 12, 14, 15.* Nor is it true which he further insinuates, that Christ *came to shut Heaven's Gates against those to whom they were before open*, or to put the Heathens, those who never heard of him, in a worse Condition than they were in before. Though it is true, that as to those to whom the Offers of the Gospel are made, and who shut their Eyes against that glorious Light, the Scripture leaves little room for favourable Thoughts or Hopes concerning them; which it were to be wished this Author, and others of his Way, would seriously consider.

If some Passages of Scripture *impute human Parts to God*, as when we read of his *Arm*, his *Eye*, his *Bowels*, which by an easy Metaphor understood by all the World signify his Power, his Knowledge, his Mercy, the Scripture it self sufficiently secures every attentive Reader against taking

king these in a wrong Sense, by the noble Descriptions it every where gives of the Spirituality, Immenfity, Invisibilty of the supreme Being, as has been already observed, p. 194. And as to what he adds, that it *ascribes human Infirmities and Passions of the worst kind to God*, such as *Wrath, Jealousy, Fury, &c.* this has been so fully considered and obviated, Part I. p. 224, *et seq.* that I shall refer the Reader thither, that I may not imitate the Author in needless Repetitions.

I shall only observe further, that whereas he cites *Ezek. 20. 21, 25.* to shew that God in *Anger* gave his own favourite People, *Statutes which were not good, and Judgments by which they could not live**; the plain Meaning of it to any one that impartially considers the whole Passage is only this, that because the *Israelites* obstinately and ungratefully transgressed and rejected the Statutes and Laws which God had given them, which if they had observed, it would have been well with them, therefore in his righteous Judgment he gave them up to the Hardness and Blindness of their own Hearts, to follow the corrupt Customs, and impious Rites of the Heathens round them. For what is expressed, v. 25. by God's *giving them Statutes which were not good, &c.* is explained in the following Words, v. 26. to be his *polluting them with their own Gifts, in that they caused to pass thro' the Fire all that openeth the Womb, &c.* So that the Design of this Passage is no more than is signified *Pf. 81. 11, 12.* *My People would not hearken to my Voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up unto their own Hearts Lust; and they walked in their own Counsels.* And that there is any thing in this Proceedure unworthy of God, the Author would find it hard to shew.

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* See this Text fully considered in *Shuckford's Connect. Vol. III. p. 159, & seq.*

The Apostle *Peter* calls the ceremonial Law in the Passage next produced by the Author, a *Yoke that neither we nor our Fathers were able to bear*, Acts 15. 10. A way of speaking not unusual, when we would signify any thing that is very troublesome, as the Observance of the ceremonial Law was; and it is our Advantage that we are delivered from it under the Gospel. And yet troublesome as it was, it was wisely fitted to the Circumstances of the Time and People when and to whom it was first given: as its numerous Rites contained both the Shadow of good Things to come, and tended to preserve the *Jews* from the idolatrous Customs of the Heathen Nations, to which they were so much addicted.

The Author's next Instance, to shew that the Scripture is contrary to what Reason teaches concerning God, is, that *in a great Number of Places he is said to do Things to try People, and yet notwithstanding this Caution, is frequently said to repent*. But since there cannot be nobler Descriptions than the Scripture frequently gives us of God's Omniscience*, that he *knoweth all Things from the Beginning*; that *there is not any Creature that is not manifest in his Sight, but all Things are naked and opened unto his Eyes*; that he *understandeth even our Thoughts afar off*; that *no Thought can be withholden from him*; that he *knows what is in Man, and is perfectly acquainted with all his Ways*; it is scarce possible for the commonest Reader that considers the Scriptures, to think that when God is said to *try Men*, he does it for his own Information, or to discover something which he did not know before. And therefore the plain Design of such Passages is only to signify, that God does those Things to exercise Men's Virtues,

* Acts 15. 18. Hebr. 4. 13. Ps. 139. 2, 3. Job 42. 2. Ps. 44. 21. John 2. 25.

to discover them to themselves and to the World, or to give them an Opportunity of shewing the Truth and Sincerity of their Professions, of their Faith and Love and Obedience. So when he tried *Abraham* by commanding him to offer his Son, he perfectly knew beforehand what he would do, but ordered it so, that it might be a signal Proof to all Ages of the Strength of his Faith, and his intire Submission to the Will of God.

Since we are expressly told in Scripture*, that God is not as *the Son of Man that he should repent*; that *his Gifts and Calling are without Repentance*; that *with him is no Variableness, neither Shadow of turning*; and since the *Immutability* of his Counsel and Purpose is there so frequently and so gloriously describ'd; this plainly leads even a common Reader to understand those Passages that speak of God's *repenting*, not as signifying a Changeableness of Counsel, as if things had happen'd which he did not foresee, but only a Change in his outward Conduct, and in the Method of his Dealings with Men; as when he turns from a Method of Severity to that of Indulgence, or the contrary. But this very Change in his Conduct was part of his original Scheme, upon a full View of the whole Series of Events, as every one must believe that governs himself by the sacred Writings.

But, says the Author, *the Scripture supposes that God has repented so often, that he is weary of Repenting*; for which he cites *Jer. 15. 6*. He may for aught I know think this to be a witty Observation. But the plain Meaning of that Passage, as any one will find that reads it with what goes before from the beginning of the Chapter, is only this; that whereas God had often in his Dealings with the *Jews* turn'd from the Severity of his Justice to milder Methods, and thus seem'd to re-
pent

* 1 Sam. 15. 29. Num. 23. 19. Rom. 11. 29. Jam. 1. 17.

pent of the Evils he had threaten'd them with, and they did not grow better by it, but abused his Goodness; therefore he would not now use such Methods of Indulgence, but would most certainly inflict the Judgments he had threaten'd. And therefore he lets *Jeremiah* know, he would not hear the Prayers that he or others might offer for them.

When we are told, that *in six Days the Lord made Heaven and Earth, and on the seventh Day he rested and was refreshed*, *Exod. 31. 17.* which this Gentleman thinks must give the Bulk of Mankind strange Notions of the Supreme Being; 'tis scarce possible that any that read the Scriptures should think that this is intended to signify, that God is properly capable of Weariness, and that he needed Rest to refresh him after his Labours, as Men do when they are tired. For does not the Scripture itself effectually secure the Vulgar from such Apprehensions, by expressly declaring, that *the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the Ends of the Earth, fainteth not, neither is weary*? *Isa. 40. 28.* Does it not every-where give the most glorious and admirable Descriptions of his Almighty Power? and particularly it often represents the wonderful Facility with which he created this vast Universe; that he *only spake and it was done*, *Psal. 33. 6, 8. Gen. 1. 3, 9, 11, 24.* A way of Expression which that fine heathen Critick *Longinus* admir'd, as containing the true Sublime. His resting therefore on the seventh Day is capable of no other Sense but this, that then the Creation of the World was finish'd, and that God had a Complacency in his Work, in this Universe which he had form'd, as bearing the glorious Characters of his own divine Perfections. And there is nothing in this but what conveys to us a noble Idea, worthy of the Deity.

But

But our Author, who neglects nothing that he thinks may expose the Scriptures, observes, that
“ though Reason tells us, that the only true God
“ is invisible, yet many Texts suppose him to
“ have been often seen by mortal Eyes; and especially to have been for many days together visible on Mount *Sinai*, where what was under his
“ Feet is mention’d; and that the Nobles, on
“ whom God laid not his Hand, *saw God, and*
“ *did eat and drink.* That he spoke to *Moses*
“ *Face to Face*, *Exod. 33. 11.* where we also read
“ of God’s putting *Moses* in the Cleft of the Rock,
“ and covering him with his Hand, and taking
“ it away again, that he might see his *Back-parts*,
“ ver. 21, 22, 23.” He thinks all these Passages must give the Vulgar strange Notions of God, if the Light of Nature did not direct them right.

But do not the Scriptures expressly assure us *, that *God is a Spirit*, that he is *invisible*, that *no Man hath seen him at any time, or can see him*, that *no Likeness can be compared unto him*? And does not *Moses* himself take particular care to guard the *Jews* against any such gross Conceptions of the Deity, as if he were of a visible Shape, severely forbidding them to worship him under any Image or corporeal Representation whatsoever? Does not he expressly declare to them, that *they saw no manner of Similitude on the Day that the Lord spake unto them in Horeb, out of the midst of the Fire*? *Deut. 4. 12, 15, 16.* It is manifest therefore, that the Passages mention’d by this Writer cannot possibly be design’d to signify, that God is of a corporeal Form, or that the Divine Essence can be seen with the bodily Eye. Nor can any Persons of common Understanding that search the Scriptures, and take their Notions of the Deity from thence, think so. When therefore they read, that the *Elders* or *Nobles*

* *John 4. 24. 1 Tim. 1. 17. 6. 16. John 1. 18. If. 40. 18.*

bles of Israel saw God, all that they can conclude from it is no more than this, that they saw a wonderful Glory, the Sign and Symbol of a present Deity; to this the Elders or Nobles were allow'd to draw near without being consum'd; and the lower part of that glorious Appearance is there call'd his *Feet*. The *Glory of the Lord* which is so often mention'd, particularly *Exod. 24. 16, 17. 40. 35, 36.* is there evidently to be understood of a visible majestick Splendor, though without any corporeal Shape, beyond Imagination bright and glorious, proper to strike the Beholders with a Sense of God's more immediate Presence and incomparable Majesty. It was usually shrouded or inshrin'd in a dark Cloud that vail'd the Splendor of it, which would otherwise be too great for mortal Eyes to bear. Hence the Lord is said to come unto *Moses in a thick Cloud*, *Exod. 19. 9.* and we are told, that *there was a thick Cloud upon the Mount*, ver. 16. and again, that *Moses drew near unto the thick Darknefs where God was*, *Exod. 20. 21.* that is, he drew near to the thick Cloud in which was the Glory of the Lord, that amazing Splendor and Majesty, the visible illustrious Sign of the unseen Deity. When therefore *Moses* besought God to *shew him his Glory*, *Exod. 33. 18.* the natural and most literal Sense of it is this, that he desired that as a Token of the extraordinary Favour with which God was pleased to honour him, he would vouchsafe to admit him to a full and immediate View of that divine Brightness and Splendor of Majesty, without the Cloud or Darknefs that usually vail'd and cover'd it. And when God let him know that he could not *see his Face and live*, but that he would shew him *his Back-parts*; this is design'd to signify, that he would grant him such a View of that Glory as he was able to bear, but not in its full Lustre and Majesty, which

which would have over-power'd his frail Nature. And this being the Case, what is there absurd in his being placed in the Cleft of the Rock, and cover'd or overshadow'd there, till the brightest part of that glorious Appearance pass'd by, the resplendent Lustre of which was too piercing for mortal Eyes, and then being allow'd to behold it in a lower Degree of Light and Glory?

This is the plain Meaning of the whole Passage literally interpreted. And I cannot see what there is in all this that can convey to the People unworthy Notions of the supreme Being. No Argument can be brought to prove, that God may not on extraordinary Occasions exhibit a visible majestick Glory, to strike and impress the Beholders with a more lively Sense of his immediate Presence, and his incomparable Greatness and Majesty. And granting such a visible glorious Light and Splendor, this might have a *Fore-part* or a *Face*, and a *Back-part*, though the Divine Essence cannot; it might have a bright Side where it shone in its full unvail'd Lustre, too bright and dazzling for any mortal Eye to bear, and it might have a darker Side where there was a lower Degree of Glory which *Moses* saw. But there is no Danger that any that read the Scripture, and take their Notions from thence, should think that the Divine Essence (which is all along in the sacred Writings represented as immense, filling Heaven and Earth) was circumscrib'd within the Limits of that glorious Appearance, or had, properly speaking, Fore-parts or Back-parts. So when the *Glory of the Lord* fill'd the Temple at the Dedication of it, *Solomon* said, *The Lord hath said, that he would dwell in the thick Darkness*; which is to be understood of that thick Cloud in the midst of which was the wonderful Glory, the visible Token of God's immediate Presence. But did *Solomon* suppose that his Essence

was

was confined there? Far from this, we find him immediately declaring in his admirable Prayer on that Occasion, *Behold, the Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee, how much less this House which I have builded!* 1 Kings 8. 12, 27.

If this Author's Prejudices had given him leave, he might easily have found something to admire in the Passage he takes so much pains to ridicule. When *Moses* desir'd; that God would shew him his Glory, he was answer'd, that God would cause his *Goodness to pass before him*; and would *proclaim his Name* or his glorious Attributes before him, *Exod.* 33. 19. intimating that to know God in his glorious Attributes or moral Perfections, was of much greater Importance to him, than to be admitted to the immediate Vision of that external divine Glory, even though he had been able to behold it in all its unutterable Splendor. And accordingly we are told, that *the Lord passed by and proclaimed*, that is, the glorious resplendent Appearance, the visible majestick Symbol of God's immediate Presence, *passed by*, from whence a Voice issued that *proclaimed, the Lord; the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness and Truth, &c.* *Exod.* 34. 5, 6.

As to the Passage which this Writer also mentions, where God is represented as speaking to *Moses Face to Face, as a Man speaketh to his Friend*, *Exod.* 33. 11. all that the commonest Reader can understand by it, is only that it signifies the clear and familiar manner in which God was pleased to communicate his Will to *Moses*; and so it is explain'd, *Numb.* 12. 6, 7, 8.

I would only observe further on this Subject, that though this Author would fain have it thought that such Passages as these now mention'd, must needs give the Vulgar very strange Notions of God, yet 'tis certain in Fact, that the *Jews* themselves, tho'

I believe he has but a mean Opinion of their Understandings, did not understand them in that gross Sense he seems willing to put upon them; which was plainly owing to this, that the Law of *Moses* where these Passages are, contains such grand and noble Descriptions of the Deity, as naturally led the People to form the most exalted Notions of the supreme Being, his infinite Majesty and Greatness, and Glory; so that even the meanest of them might easily know that it could not be the Intention of those Passages to signify that God is of a corporeal Form, which would be intirely contrary to a considerable part of that Law. And it is owing principally to their Regard to the Law of *Moses*, that they have still such an extreme Abhorrence of all Images, and debasing Representations of the Deity. This Writer therefore has evident Fact against him. He would have it thought, that Reason is very clear concerning the Spirituality, Invisibility, Immenstity, of the supreme Being, and that the Scripture only tends to lead the People to form wrong Notions of all these; and yet it is certain in Fact, that the People have been generally addicted to gross Conceptions and Representations of the Deity, when left merely to themselves and their own Reason; and that the reading and considering the Scriptures has been in all Ages the most effectual Antidote against these; and that the freer Access the common People have had to the Scriptures, and the more they have read and consider'd them, the more averse have they always been to any unworthy Representations of God, or to the worshipping him under corporeal Images and Resemblances.

And indeed it is scarce possible to behold the dissingenuous Conduct of this Author, and not be moved with a just Indignation; who, without taking notice of those noble and sublime Descriptions
of

of God, and his Attributes, with which the Scriptures every-where abound, and which have been regarded in all Ages with Admiration by those that have been the ablest Judges of what is fine and just and noble in Sentiment or Expression, seems only solicitous to find out something to expose and censure. If he can but find an Expression, that taken strictly according to the Letter, seems to carry some Absurdity in it, he gladly lays hold of it, though it be plain to any Man of common Understanding that reads the Scripture, that the Expression is figurative, and was originally intended to be taken so. Or if he meets with a parabolical Representation, which he thinks taken in the Letter (which it was never intended to be) carries an odd Appearance, this also shall be represented in a ridiculous Light, though the general Design of it (which is all that is to be regarded in such parabolical Representations) is useful and excellent.

Of this kind is the next Instance he produces concerning the Conference between God and Satan in the Book of *Job*. It is a parabolical Representation of God's providential Government of the World. Every body knows that in such kind of Representations, many Circumstances are only added for Ornament; and it is sufficient, if the general Scope be easily understood, as it is in this Case. When the *Sons of God*, that is, according to Scripture-Language, the Angels, are represented as at certain Times, *presenting themselves before the Lord*, as it were to give an account of their Conduct, I can see nothing in this, but what gives a noble Idea of God's providential Government; and when Satan is also represented as *coming among them to present himself before the Lord*, *Job* 1. 6. 2. 1. the evident Design of it is to signify, that evil Angels as well as good ones, are accountable to God, and under the sovereign Control and Influence

fluence of his most wise and righteous Providence. And what there is in this unworthy of the supreme Being, I cannot see. What follows in that Parable by way of Conference between God and Satan, furnishes these useful Instructions obvious to a common Reader: That Satan is ever envious at good Men, and ready to calumniate them, and do them mischief, and yet that he is absolutely under the Control of divine Providence, and can do no more than God permits; and that when it pleases God, for wise Ends, to suffer him to distress and harass his faithful Servants, whether for the Punishment of their Sins; or for the Exercise and Trial of their Faith and Patience and other Virtues, he will not suffer him utterly to overwhelm them, but governs and restrains his Malice, and will so order it, that it shall only tend in the Issue to their greater Benefit, and render their Virtue and his own Wisdom and Goodness more illustrious; as it manifestly was in the Case of *Job*. This is all that can be naturally concluded from this Representation, and the Author may be safely challeng'd to shew, that there is any thing in this that tends to give the Vulgar unworthy Notions of the Deity. Is it unworthy God to lay Afflictions upon good Men, or to exercise their Virtues with severe Trials? None will pretend this, that own a Providence. Many of the Heathen Moralists have said excellent Things on this Subject; particularly *Seneca*; who represents a good Man bravely struggling under Misfortunes as a glorious Spectacle worthy of God himself. Or is it unworthy of God to permit evil Spirits to be Instruments in afflicting good Men? But I see nothing in this that can reasonably be objected against; provided still, that he over-rules and governs their Malice (of which he is not the Author or Cause) in a Subserviency to his own most wise Designs. And in this the in-

finite Wisdom and Beauty of his providential Government eminently appears.

But the Author thinks it strange that *Satan* should be allow'd to *slay Job's Children and Servants, only because he would not otherwise be satisfied of Job's Integrity*. But Providence had evidently higher Ends in view. We need not inquire whether *Job's Children* might not have sinned and deserved such a Punishment, as *Job* himself suspected, *Job* 1. 5. Let us suppose them good and innocent; I can see no more Injustice in God's suffering *Satan* to slay them, than in his suffering wicked Men frequently to wreck their Malice in the Ruin of the Innocent. In either Case, if good People suffer at present, God will turn their Calamities, and even their Death, to their advantage, and will over-rule the Malice of evil Beings towards them, to bring about his own most wise and gracious Purposes.

The Author goes on to mention that Passage of *Zechariah*, in which *Satan* is introduced as accusing the High-Priest, and the Lord as rebuking *Satan*; but besides that it is evident, all this was transacted in Vision, I don't know any thing that can be gather'd from it, but on the one hand *Satan's* readiness to resist every good Work, and on the other hand, God's rebuking him, and disappointing his Malice. What he mentions concerning the Serpent and *Eve*, shall be consider'd afterwards, with some other Instances here produced by him, which tend rather to shew the Ignorance of the Author of the Book of *Genesis*, than that the Scripture gives unworthy Notions of the supreme Being, which is what he here undertook to shew. The Story of *Jacob's* wrestling all Night with the Angel, is sufficiently explain'd in Scripture itself, that it was by *weeping* and making *Supplication unto him* that he *had power over the Angel and prevail'd*, *Hos.* 12. 3, 4. So that all that can be gather'd

ther'd from it is the Earnestness of his Prayer, whereby he prevail'd with God; and to signify this, he was honour'd with the Name of *Israel*. And if it pleas'd God at the same time that he so highly honour'd him, so to render it that he should have something to humble him and to be a Memorial of his own Frailty and Weakness, which seems to have been the Design of the Lameness that was then inflicted on him, that he might not be exalted above measure, I see nothing absurd in this, or unworthy of the divine Wisdom and Goodness.

The Story of *Balaam's* Ass comes next, and this Writer makes it a mighty Difficulty, that the Ass must have had a great number of Ideas to have reason'd with his Master, when he saw and knew an Angel. This only proves that it was very wonderful, which will be easily allow'd; but it is no Proof that a Thing is false or impossible, because it is very strange; for many strange and unaccountable things have happen'd; and if it was done by the divine Power, to which it is expressly ascrib'd in the Text itself, *Numb. 22. 28.* I suppose it will be own'd, that it was not too difficult for God. But this Writer seems mightily concern'd for *Balaam*, and to think he was very hardly dealt with, *since he did as God bid him, and spoke what he would have him speak.* And no wonder, when he was under the Constraint of a higher Power, which over-rul'd him contrary to his own Inclinations. It appears from the whole Story, that *he loved the Wages of Unrighteousness*, as *St. Peter* speaks; that the Bribe had such an Influence upon him, that he would with all his heart have cursed *Israel*, though he knew it was the Will of God they should be blessed. And when he had receiv'd an express Order from God, yet when *Balak* sent new Offers, he was for trying again in hopes of procuring a new Order, as if God were to be

brib'd too to change his Purpose; which I think argu'd both Wickedness and Folly: And the Apostle *Peter* was not out when he spoke of *the Madness of the Prophet*, though the Author can find *nothing like Madness in the whole Story*. He would fain have *Balaam* perfectly innocent, tho' *Balaam* himself, who must be supposed to be much better acquainted with his own Intentions, own'd that he had sinned, *Numb. 22. 34.* And it may sufficiently let us into his Character, that in order to draw down a Curse upon the *Israelites*, whom he knew the Lord had blessed, it was by his Counsel that the *Midianites* endeavour'd to intice them to Whoredom and Idolatry, an Advice that none but a very bad Man was capable of giving, *Numb. 31. 16.*

This Writer, who is very industrious to collect every thing that may make the Scriptures appear ridiculous, next thinks fit to mention the Commands given by God to some of the Prophets, which he thinks, *if taken according to the Letter, seem unworthy of God, as making them act like Madmen or Ideots*; see p. 255 *. But very probably many of the things here mention'd by the Author were not really done, but were only propheticall Parables or lively Representations, impress'd in a strong manner on the Imaginations of the Prophets, and which they afterwards related to the People in the order and manner in which they were represented to them, and acted over in their Fancy. Thus when *Ezekiel* was carried in Vision to *Jerusalem*, and saw many things there relating to their Idolatries, the Destruction that was coming upon the Body of them, and the Preservation of a Remnant, see the 8th and following Chapters, it is added in the Conclusion, *Then spake I unto them of the Captivity all the things that the Lord*
had

* P. 229.

had shewed me, Ezek. 11. 25. It is very evident, that *Ezekiel's* eating the Roll which was written within and without, Ezek. 3. 1, 3. and St. *John's* eating the Book, Rev. 10. 9. was transacted only in a prophetic Vision. It is thus also we are to understand what is told us concerning *Ezekiel's* pourtraying *Jerusalem* on a Tile, and laying siege to it, and lying 390 Days on one Side, and 40 Days on the other, and his eating Dung, &c. to signify the Siege of *Jerusalem*, and the Distress they should be reduced to. The same may probably be supposed, concerning *Isaiah's* walking naked three Years, and *Jeremiah's* Journey to *Euphrates* to hide his Girdle by the Riverside, and his second Journey to take it from thence, when it was quite spoiled and ruined, and *Hosea's* taking a Wife of Whoredoms, &c. It is no Objection against this, that many of these Actions seemed to take up a considerable Time, since in Visions there may be a lively Representation of Actions of a long Continuance; the distinct Seasons of doing those Actions, and even a Succession of Years may be represented as well as the Actions themselves.

But after all, if we should suppose that many of these Things were really and literally done; e. g. That *Isaiah* walked naked, that is, without his upper Garment, which is all that is meant by that Expression in this and several other Passages of Scripture; That *Jeremiah* went to *Euphrates*, and hid his Girdle till it was spoiled and good for nothing, as a Type or Sign to that People whom God had so signally favoured and chosen to himself, of the Destruction that was coming upon them, and of their being carried away to *Babylon*, Jer. 13. 1, 11. That *Ezekiel* dug through the Wall of his House, and carried out his Goods by Day-light, having his Face covered in token of Mourning,

Mourning, to give the People a more lively and affecting Representation of the Distress of *Jerusalem*, and the Captivity of *Zedekiah*, *Ezek.* 12. 3, 4, 12. That *Jeremiah* actually wore wooden Yokes, and sent them to several Kings as a visible Token that they should be made subject to the King of *Babylon*, which would make a deeper Impression on them than mere Words alone would have done: Yea, if we should suppose that the Prophet *Hoseab* by the Command of God himself took to *Wife* one that had not behaved well before Marriage, though promising a better Conduct, or one that God saw would prove unfaithful to him afterwards, (in which Case his foreknowing it was not the Cause of her Unfaithfulness) and that he had Children by her, to whom symbolical Names were given, the more effectually to represent to the People of *Israel* their Unfaithfulness to God, who had taken them into so near a Relation to himself by a solemn Covenant, and his rejecting them at last after having long borne with their Provocations; I see nothing even in this that can be proved to be in it self sinful or immoral.

It must be owned these Things appear strange to us; but this is no Proof that they were not proper as then circumstanced, and did not answer valuable Ends. The Prophets prophesied by Actions as well as Words. Some of those Actions were extraordinary, and designed to be so. And when the People saw those whom they knew to be true Prophets acting some Things which seemed odd and unusual by the Command of God himself, it naturally put them upon inquiring into the Design and Meaning of them, and quickned their Attention to the Prophecy, and fixed it more upon their Minds than bare Words alone would have done. And any one that considers how much this way was suited to the Genius of the *Eastern Nations*,

Nations, will be very cautious of passing a hasty Censure. If it pleased God in sending Prophets, and in the manner of their delivering their Prophecies, to accommodate himself to the Genius of the People among whom they prophesied, I don't know what Reason any body has to find fault; at least this Author ought not to do it, who is for judging of the Goodness and Propriety of every thing wholly by the Circumstances. Every body knows, that that may be proper at one Time, and in one Nation, which in another would be ridiculous; and it would argue a very foolish and narrow way of thinking, to judge of the Decency and Propriety of Things merely by what is agreeable to our own Times or Customs.

The Method this Writer here takes is pretty extraordinary. He just singles out some Actions of the Prophets, which taken singly and abstractedly, without considering the Intention of 'em, or the Circumstances of the Time and People in which and among whom they were done, have an odd Appearance. But if he meddles with the Account given of the Prophets in Scripture, he ought to take the whole together. If he believes the Scripture, that the Prophets had such Visions or did such Actions, he ought also to believe what is there represented, that these Actions whether transacted in Vision only, and afterwards related to the People, (as probably many of them were) or really and openly done in the sight of the People, were the Types and Signs of future Events, so interpreted at the Time when they were given, pointing to the particular Seasons and Circumstances of those Events, which no human Wisdom could foresee, and which were accomplish'd with admirable Exactness. He ought not to be so unjust as to take the Signs and separate them from what they were intended to signify; and if both be taken together, it will be hard to make the

Prophets pass for Madmen or Ideots. 'Tis plain they knew what they did, and for the most part they themselves explained and applied the Visions they related or Actions they performed at the very Time when they were done; and the Event admirably justified their Predictions. And it will be very hard to prove, that there is any thing in this way of impressing Things by Vision on the Imaginations of the Prophets, or representing them by extraordinary Signs and Types to the People, unworthy of God, or inconsistent with our natural Notions, or what Reason dictates.

But when we further consider the ultimate Design of these propheticall Visions and symbolical Representations, which was to awaken a degenerate People to a Sense of their Guilt and Danger; when we consider the pure and excellent Morals which the Prophets every where teach; the just Notions they give of Religion, endeavouring to draw the People off from a too great Dependence on ceremonious Observances to vital substantial Piety, Righteousness and Charity; when we consider the sublime and admirable Representations they give of the Deity, of his incomparable Greatness and Majesty, his Almighty Power, the Terrors of his Justice, and the Extent of his Mercy, sometimes denouncing the most awful Threatnings against obstinate Sinners, at other times inviting them to repent and turn from their evil Ways by all the Charms of Love and Goodness, and by the most encouraging Promises; when we consider the noble impartial Freedom with which they frequently rebuke the Sins of the Princes, Priests, and the whole Body of the People, though by this they exposed themselves to Hatred, Obloquy, and Reproach, and at the same time how pathetically they bewail the Miseries of their Country, pitying their Countrymen whilst they reprove their Vices; and when to all this we add the many admirable

mirable Predictions of future Events, foretold with great Particularity and Exactness; such as *Isaiab's* foretelling *Cyrus* by Name, and that he should both conquer the Nations and restore *Jerusalem*, above a hundred Years before he was born; *Jeremiab's* foretelling not only the Destruction of *Jerusalem* by the *Chaldeans* and the Captivity of the *Jews*, but the Duration of it, that it was to last 70 Years, and that then they were to be re-established in their own Land; *Ezekiel's* foretelling that *Zedekiah* should be carried to *Babylon*, to the Land of the *Chaldeans*, and yet should not see the Land, tho' he should die there; which, though seemingly contradictory, was literally accomplished, because his Eyes were put out by the King of *Babylon's* Order; with many other remarkable Predictions relating to the Fates of other Nations as well as the *Jews*, *Aegypt*, *Babylon*, *Tyre*, *Nineveh*, &c. as well as of particular Persons, which were all wonderfully and punctually accomplished; not to mention their Prophecies relating to the Messiah, the rejecting of the *Jews*, and calling of the Gentiles; I say, when we take all this together, we can't help regarding them not only as honest Men, remote from the Character of Impostors, and who had just and excellent Notions of Religion, but as Men who were extraordinarily sent and inspired of God, whose peculiar Prerogative is, that he knows *the End from the Beginning*, and declares *from ancient Times the Things that are not yet done*, *Is. 46. 10.*

And accordingly, though the Prophets often met with very ill Treatment among those whom they endeavoured to reclaim from their Wickedness, yet the *Jews* themselves in all succeeding Ages did them the Justice to own their divine Mission, and had universally the highest Veneration for them and for their Writings, though they
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give the most disadvantageous Idea of that People, and of their Manners.

It is scarce worth while to take notice of the Author's next Remark, it is so very trifling. In order to expose the Book of the Revelation of St. *John*, he would fain have the Description that is there given of the *New Jerusalem*, to pass for a literal and geographical Account of the Dimensions, &c. of a real City, and finds fault with the Interpreters for turning it into Allegory; though it is evident to the last degree from the whole Book, that all that is there represented was transacted in Vision, and is an allegorical Representation of future Events; and I believe scarce the meanest Reader can be found of common Sense that looks upon it in any other View.

But to come to what this Writer calls *Things of greater Moment*, he produces several Passages to shew, that did not Reason teach Men of the meanest Capacity, that God could not be deceived himself, or deceive us, the Scripture would lead them to think, that God can deceive and be deceived. But since there is no one Thing more frequently celebrated in the sacred Writings, than God's steady invariable Truth and Faithfulness, since he is so often called the *God of Truth*; and we are expressly told, that *his Truth endureth to all Generations*; and that *he keepeth Truth for ever*; and that *it is impossible for God to lye**; there is no danger that even the commonest Reader should be led, by the Passages mentioned by the Author, to conclude, either that the omniscient God, who is every where represented in Scripture as knowing all Things, can be deceived, or that the God, whose Faithfulness and Truth is there so gloriously celebrated, is capable of lying, or falsifying his Word and Promise, as perfidious Men do theirs.

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* 1 Sam. 15. 29. Ps. 100. 5. 117. 2. 146. 5, 6. Is. 65. 16. Hebr. 6. 18.

The first Passage he mentions is *Jer. 20. 7.* O Lord, *thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed.* I shall not urge here, that the Words might more properly be rendered, *thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded*; for the word *Pathah* used in the Original, signifies to persuade, and that whether to good or bad, see *Gen. 9. 27. Prov. 25. 15.* &c. so that it is as if the Prophet had said to God, thou hast called or moved me to the prophetical Office, and I obeyed. I did not take it upon me of my self, and merely of my own Motion, but moved by thee in a manner which I could not resist. This agrees best with the Words immediately following, *thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed*; and with the whole Context, as any one will see that examines it. But allowing the Translation to be just, as our Author has it, all that can be signified by it is, that *Jeremiah* here complains that God had frustrated his Hopes; things had happened quite contrary to his Expectation; he expected, when he entred upon the prophetical Office, that Men would universally pay a great Regard to what he delivered in the name of God, whereas he met with Contempt and Suffering and Reproach; of which he complains in the bitterness of his Soul. No body, not even the commonest Reader, regards these Expressions of *Jeremiah*, as any other than the Complaints of a Man whose Spirit was embittered and overwhelmed with Grief, and which therefore it would be barbarous to urge against him in the utmost rigour; especially when we consider that the Prophet himself, after having given some vent to his melancholy Reflections, and the first Transports of his Grief, when the Tumult of his Soul was a little allayed, recollects himself, and declares his Confidence in God; that *the Lord was with him,*
and

and that his *Persecutors should not prevail against him*, v. 11. and even breaks forth into Thanksgivings, v. 13. *sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord; for he hath delivered the Soul of the Poor from the Hand of Evil-doers.* The same Observation may be applied to that other Passage cited by the Author from *Jer. 15. 18.* It is only a passionate Expostulation, expressing the Perplexity of his Soul by reason of the many Difficulties and Oppositions he met with in the Execution of his Office, and earnestly pleading with God to remember and support him; which accordingly he did, as appears from the Words immediately following.

But any one that will consider the noble Idea *Jeremiab* frequently gives of the Justice, the Goodness, the Righteousness of God, the many strong Expressions of his Faith and Confidence in him, and his intire Resignation to the divine Will, see *Jer. 9. 24. 14. 22. 17. 7, 8, 13, 14. Lam. 3. 23, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 33.* Any one that will consult these Passages, to which many others might easily be added, will find how far he was from entertaining such unworthy Thoughts of God as this Writer insinuates; and it is not very fair to pass by such noble Sentiments, as if they were all to pass for nothing, and take advantage of some passionate Expressions in his unguarded Moments, in a time of Trouble and Temptation, which a merciful God will forgive, and every candid Reader will consider as Instances of Infirmary to be pitied rather than too rigorously censured.

The next Instance this Author mentions, furnishes a signal Instance of his Prevarication. He tells us, "that in another Prophet the Lord saith, *'The Days are prolonged, and every Vision fails;'*" for which he cites *Ezek. 12. 22.* From which Passage it is evident, that these are not the Words

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of God, (as he is pleased to represent them) but a presumptuous Proverb of the *Israelites*, whom God rebukes and reproves for it. The Design of that Proverb was, that the Evils prophesied of were a great way off, and would not come in their Days. For thus the Meaning of that Phrase, *the Days are prolonged*, is explained v. 27. *Behold they of the House of Israel say the Vision that he seeth is for many Days to come, and he prophesieth of the Times that are afar off.* And to the same purpose in the foregoing Chapter, v. 3. the *Men that gave wicked Counsel* are represented as saying, *It (that is, the threaten'd Judgment) is not near, let us build Houses, &c.* In opposition to this, and to reprove their Presumption and the wrong Use they made of his Patience and Forbearance, God declares by his Prophet, v. 28. cited also by the Author, *There shall none of my Words be prolonged any more, but the Word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God.* That is, my Threatnings shall be executed speedily, and in your own Days, so that you shall have no Pretence for saying any more, that *the Vision is prolonged*. This is the plain natural Meaning of the Words, obvious to any Man of common Understanding that reads the whole Passage. And what there is in this that should give the Vulgar unworthy Notions of the Deity, I cannot see.

But he produces another Instance from *Ezek. 14.*
9. If the Prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a Thing, I the Lord have deceived that Prophet. It appears from the Words that immediately follow, that God threatens severe Judgments against that Prophet, and against those that sought to him. *And I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my People Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity; the punishment of the Prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him.* From whence

it is evident, that this relates to the false Prophets that prophesied Lyes in his Name, of whom he had spoken largely throughout the whole preceding Chapter. God there expressly declares, that *he did not send them*, and that tho' they said, *the Lord saith it*, yet *he had not spoken to them*; and that *they prophesied out of their own Hearts, and followed their own Spirit*; see *Ezek. 13. 2, 3, 6, 7*. When therefore he declares, that he deceived those Prophets, the Meaning cannot be, (nor can any ordinary Reader that considers and compares the Scripture think so) that God himself inspired those false Prophets with the lying Messages they delivered in his Name, for this he most expressly denies. The only Sense therefore which it is capable of is this, that whereas they falsely and wickedly took upon them to deliver Messages in his Name, tho' he did not send them, he in his righteous Judgment abandoned them, as they had justly deserved, to the Delusions of their own corrupt Hearts and Imaginations, or sometimes perhaps of evil Spirits, as in the case of *Abab's* false Prophets, which shall be considered afterwards. It appears from the Account that is frequently given of those false Prophets, that they were themselves very wicked, and countenanced the People in their Crimes and Vices. See *Jer. 23. 11, 14, — 17*. They told them they should have Peace and Prosperity, when the true Prophets denounced Judgments and Calamities. *Jer. 6. 14. Ezek. 13. 10, 16*. The People, who were very vicious and corrupt, chose to hearken to them, and by the Countenance they gave them encouraged them in their false Pretences to Inspiration; and therefore the People themselves are charged with *causing those Dreams to be dreamed*, *Jer. 29. 8*. Wherefore it was just with God to deliver them up to those Delusions which they themselves had chosen and encouraged.

couraged. And this is all that is intended in that Passage produced by the Author, *Jer. 4. 10. Ab! Lord God, surely thou hast greatly deceived the People, and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have Peace, whereas the Sword reacheth unto the Soul.* It is evident that this relates to the Messages delivered by the false Prophets in the name of God, who said, *Ye shall have Peace*; but it is also evident, that God frequently in the most express Manner possible disclaims both them and this their Message. Remarkable to this purpose is that Passage, *Jer. 14. 13, 14.* where *Jeremiah* complains, *Ab Lord God, behold the Prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the Sword, neither shall ye have Famine, but I will give you assured Peace in this Place.* And then he adds, *Then the Lord said unto me, The Prophets prophesy Lyes in my Name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them; they prophesy unto you a false Vision, &c.* And then he proceeds to denounce the most awful Judgments against those false Prophets, and against the People that suffered themselves to be seduced by them; see also *Chap. 23. 21. 27. 15. 29. 8, 9.* and *Ezek. 13. 16.* By comparing these several Passages, it is evident to the last Degree, that when God is said to have deceived the People, viz. by the Messages delivered by the false Prophets in his Name, who told 'em they should have Peace, the utmost that can be understood by it is, that when the People would not hearken to the many solemn and express Warnings given them by the true Prophets in his Name, he justly suffered them to be led aside by the Delusions of false ones, who pretended to speak Peace in his Name, though he neither inspired nor sent them. But this cannot be understood as if the People were under a Necessity of being deceived by those false Prophets (as this Writer insinuates); on the contrary, it was wholly

wholly their own Fault, if they were deceived by them. God warns them often in a most solemn manner, not to give heed to these false Prophets; he describes them by their Characters, he denounces Judgments against them. And it appears from several Passages, that the People followed those false Prophets, only because they pleased and flattered them; and countenanced them in their Vices; and that though they did not pay a due regard to the Messages delivered by the true Prophets in the Name of God, yet they were convinced in their Consciences, that he sent them; see *Jer.* 5. 11, 12. 21. 2. 26. 16. 37. 37. 42. 2, 3, 5. 44. 16. And a People so incorrigible, and who shut their Eyes against the Light, deserved to be abandon'd by the just Judgment of God to their own Blindness and evil Counsels, and to the Delusions of those false Prophets, whom they chose to follow; which is all that is signified by the Passages this Writer produces.

On this Occasion, I shall take notice of what he mentions afterwards, as a great Difficulty, and which tends to give the People unworthy Notions of the Deity, that "four hundred Prophets were
"deceived at once to the Destruction of a number of innocent Persons," 2 *Chron* 18. 5, 18, 21, 22. Here he produces the Parable of the Prophet *Micaiah*, which is evidently an allegorical Vision or parabolical Representation. The general Design of which (and this is all that is to be regarded in Representations of this nature) is plain and obvious to a common Understanding; *viz.* to signify to *Abab*, that his Prophets who bid him go up to *Ramoth-Gilead* were false Prophets acted by a lying Spirit, and that God permitted this, and gave up *Abab* to their Delusions, as a just Punishment on him for his Crimes; and for his persecuting and destroying the true Prophets of God;

and

and to bring about the Destruction his Idolatry and Wickedness had deserved.

As to the Circumstance of the lying Spirit, offering himself to deceive *Abab*, and being sent of God for that purpose, it is evident that this is not an Account of any thing that was literally transacted; and every body knows that in things of this kind, every Expression and Circumstance is not to be strain'd to the utmost Rigour. All that can be concluded from it is this, that God often sees fit, for the wise Ends of his Providence, to permit evil Spirits as well as wicked Men to act according to their Natures, in endeavouring to deceive and to do mischief, and then over-rules even their Malice and Falshood (of which he is not the Author or Cause) for the most wise and righteous Purposes of his Government. They can do nothing of this kind without his Permission, or any further than he permits, (as all must own that acknowledge a God and a Providence at all) and he has always wise and just Ends in permitting them. And yet in this very Instance *Abab* or the *Israelites* were not under a Necessity of being deceived, as this Writer intimates; on the contrary, it appears from this Story itself, that God gave *Abab* fair Warning by the Mouth of his own Prophet *Micaiah*, not to trust those false Prophets; and if he did not regard it, and thereby occasion'd his own Death, as well as that of several of his Subjects, it was his own Fault. And it seems evident, that he really regarded *Micaiah* as a true Prophet of God, though he hated him for telling him plain Truth without Flattery or Disguise.

But this Writer carries his Charge farther, and tells us, that there are other Texts, which, if taken literally, represent God not only falsifying his Word, but his Oaths. To this purpose he produces *Numb.*

14. 30, 34. where God saith to the Children of

Israel, Ye shall not come into the Land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell in it, and ye shall know my Breach of Promise. All that understand the Original, know that these last Words run only thus, ye shall know my Breach, which some of the ancient Interpreters understood of God's breaking in upon them to punish them for their Sins*; but allowing our own Translation to be just, all that any common Reader can understand by it is, that because of their Unbelief and Disobedience, which was so highly aggravated, God would not bring those of that Generation into the Land of Canaan, which they indeed might be ready to charge as a Breach of Promise on God's part, but really was not so; since besides that the Promise was not merely made to those particular Persons, but to the People of Israel, as *Grotius* observes, and so the Intent of it was as truly accomplish'd when God brought their Posterity into the Land, which he here tells them he would do, ver. 31. as if they themselves in their own Persons had inherited it; besides this, I say, the Promise as well as the whole Covenant God made with the *Israelites* was conditional, and their Entrance into the Land of Canaan and Continuance in it was on Condition of their Obedience; so that there is no Pretence for accusing God of a real Breach either of his Word or Oath. And though the *Israelites* in their Discontent and Murmuring, seem'd to charge him as if he had dealt deceitfully with them, and had brought them there only to slay them, ver. 3. yet nothing is more plain, than that their not entring in was wholly owing to themselves; and that if they had obey'd the divine Commands, and trusted in his Promise, they

* The LXX render it, Ye shall know τὸν θυμὸν τοῦ κυρίου μου, the Indignation of mine Anger; and *Jerom* renders it, Ye shall know *Ultionem meam*, my Vengeance; which *Le Clerc* approves as the most probable Rendering.

they would have enter'd in, in their own Persons, as well as *Caleb* and *Joshua* did, and as their own Children did afterwards, notwithstanding all the fancy'd Difficulties. This is the plain State of the Case, obvious to an ordinary Reader; and it may therefore safely be left to any common Understanding, whether there be danger of concluding from this, that God is unfaithful and untrue. All that can be justly concluded from it is this most excellent and useful Instruction, that even where God seems most expressly to promise the most glorious Blessings, yet People may forfeit them by their Disobedience and Unbelief; in which Case the Promise may seem to be vacated, though the Breach is really not on God's part, who was ready to fulfil it, but on theirs, who do not answer the Conditions, whether express'd or implied, on which alone those Blessings are promised.

This may help us to judge of another Instance mention'd afterward by the Author, p. 275*.
" that God promised to drive out the *Canaanites*
" without fail before the *Israelites*, and yet *Israel*
" could not drive them out in several Places."
It is very evident, that that Promise was conditional. God promised to drive them out before them on Condition they obey'd his Voice, and did not fall into the idolatrous Customs of those Nations; in which Case he threaten'd that he would not drive them out before them, and that they should be *Thorns in their Sides*, Numb. 33. 55. Josh. 23. 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13. Judg. 2. 2, 3, 20, 21. To which it may be added, that it was never promised them, that they should drive out the *Canaanites* all at once, but it is expressly said, that *the Lord their God would put out those Nations before them by little and little*, Deut. 7. 22. Exod. 23. 29, 30. which accordingly was literally ac-

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complish'd.

compleish'd. As to what the Author there adds, "that in one Instance it is said, *the Lord was with Judah, and he drove out the Inhabitants of the Mountain, but could * not drive out the Inhabitants of the Valley, because they had Chariots of Iron,* Judg. 1. 19." the plain Meaning of it is no more than this, that as the Victories Judah obtain'd were owing to the Blessing of God, so their making no further Progress was owing to themselves and to their own Unbelief, who notwithstanding all the glorious Things God had done for them, were affrighted with the Iron Chariots of the Canaanites, and durst not attempt them. So it was with Ephraim and Manasseh, Josh. 17. 16. They dreaded the Iron Chariots of the Canaanites, but Joshua let them know, that if it were not their own fault, this should be no hindrance to their driving them out, ver. 18. and afterwards we find it did not hinder them from destroying Jabin and Sisera, though they had nine hundred Chariots of Iron, Judg. 4. 3, 15. Nor indeed is it possible for any Man of the meanest Capacity that reads the Scripture, which every-where contains such glorious Descriptions of God's almighty irresistible Power, to suppose that it is the Design of that Passage to insinuate, that it was for want of Power in God that those Canaanites were not expelled.

This Writer further observes, "that in the 89th Psalm David [he should have said Ethan] complains of God's Breach of his Covenant, and of his Oath, and in summing up those Breaches he says, *Thou hast made void the Covenant of thy Servant; Lord, where are thy former Loving-kindnesses, which thou swearest to David in thy Truth?*" But since the Psalmist begins that Psalm

* The word *could* is not in the Original, and it might as justly have been rendered *did not drive out*, or *proceeded not to drive out*, &c. See *Scripture vindicated*, Part 2.

Psalms with declaring, *I will sing of the Mercies of the Lord for ever, with my Mouth will I make known thy Faithfulness to all Generations*; and so goes on to describe the everlasting Faithfulness and Truth of God in the most glorious manner; since he sets himself particularly to celebrate the Stability of his Word and Promise, and declares his firm Affiance in it, ver. 1, 2, 5, 8, 14. It is impossible for any Man of common Sense that reads this to suppose, that it was the Psalmist's Intention in this very Psalm, in which he celebrates the Faithfulness and Truth of God in so admirable and sublime a manner, and represents it as one of his peculiar Glories, to accuse him of a direct Breach of his Covenant and Oath, and consequently to represent him as unfaithful and false to the highest Degree. The Words therefore which this Author produces cannot be regarded in any other view, than as a passionate Expostulation, how it came to pass that when God was so faithful and true, as the Psalmist knew and firmly believed he was, yet Appearances at present look'd another way; he suffer'd *Judah* to lie in Ruins, which might tempt the Heathen to think, that God had forgotten or broken his Covenant; see ver. 49. 50, 51. But at the same time he himself testifies his firm Dependence on the divine Faithfulness and Promise, concluding the Psalm with solemn Praise, *Blessed be the Lord for evermore. Amen and Amen.*

The Author next proceeds to some Facts mention'd in Scripture, which look as if the Prophets either were deceived themselves, or were willing to deceive others. To this purpose he observes, "that the Prophetess *Huldah* assures good King *Josiah* from the Lord, that he should be gathered to his Grave in Peace, and yet soon after he received a mortal Wound, of which he died, 2 Chron. 34. 28. 35. 23." But there is no Difficulty in

this, since any one that consults the Context may easily find, that the Meaning of his being *gathered to his Grave in Peace* was no more than this, that the threaten'd publick Judgments and Calamities that were to come upon *Judah* and *Jerusalem* (concerning which alone they enquir'd of *Huldab* the Prophetess) should not happen in his Days. And thus it is interpreted in the very Text itself. For after having said, *Behold I will gather thee to thy Fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy Grave in Peace*, it is immediately added, to shew what was to be understood by his coming to his Grave in Peace, *neither shall thine Eyes see all the Evil that I will bring upon this Place, and upon the Inhabitants of the same*. And this was very true; for none of those publick Calamities came upon *Judah* or *Jerusalem* in his Time. *Pharaoh Necho* did not come to invade *Jerusalem* or *Judah*, or to disturb his Peace, and sent him word so; and therefore *Josiah* needed not to have concern'd himself about it at all; and the Wound he got on that Occasion was what he brought upon himself unnecessarily by his own Rashness; see 2 *Chron.* 35. 21, 22.

As to *Elisba's* sending word to *Benhadad King of Syria* he should recover, and yet telling *Hazael* that he should surely die, though he had received forty Camels Loads of the good things of *Damascus*, to tell the King the Truth, 2 *Kings* 8. 7, 10. not to urge, that the Words, ver. 10. might be render'd (as some do) agreeably to the *Ketib* or Reading in the *Hebrew* Text thus, *Go say thou shalt not certainly recover, for the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die*; if we keep to our own Translation, which follows the *Keri* or marginal *Hebrew* Reading, it is easily accounted for. What *Benhadad* sent to know from the Prophet was, whether he should recover of that Disease of which he was then sick, as appears from ver. 8. to which the Prophet

phet answers, that he *should recover*, that is, that he should not die of that Disease, the Distemper would not prove mortal to him; but at the same time he signifies, that *the Lord had shew'd him that he should certainly die*, viz. some other way, though not by the Disease. Now this is so far from being a Proof that the Prophet was deceived himself, or had a mind to deceive, that it is a signal Instance of the Exactness of his Foreknowledge, since what the Prophet here foretold, though seemingly inconsistent, was literally true. *Benbadad* did not die of the Distemper, and yet died another way, for *Hazael* smother'd him. And if, as it is very probable, *Hazael* had at that very time form'd a Design against *Benbadad's* Life, the Prophet here intimates to him, that he knew his secret Intentions. Indeed it is hard to know what Answer this Author would have had the Prophet return to *Benbadad's* Message; would he have had him say, that he should die of the Distemper (for that was what he sent to inquire about) when he knew he should not die of it? or would he have had him advertise him of the Conspiracy against him? and what Advantage would this have been to him, when *Hazael* the Conspirator was to carry the Message, who we may be sure would take care not to deliver any thing to the King as from the Prophet, that might disappoint his own Design? If the Prophet here foretold to *Hazael* that he should be King of *Syria*, and if *Elijah* had anointed him before, as this Writer observes, this only shews that he was to be King after the Death of *Benbadad*, as *David* was to be King after the Death of *Saul*, but then he ought to have waited for his Death; the Prediction neither caused nor justified his killing *Benbadad*, any more than the Prophet's foretelling his barbarous and inhuman Treatment of the *Israelites*, was the Cause of his Cruelty, or a Justification of it.

This Writer next mentions *Jude's* quoting the *Assumption of Moses*, and the *Prophecy of Enoch*, and takes it for granted that he refers to the apocryphal Books which afterwards appear'd in the primitive Church under those Names; which is not at all probable, nor does he produce the least Proof for it. He adds, that *St. Jude* quotes those Books as *inspired*. But admitting that he took the Passages he mentions out of some ancient Jewish Book, * it does not prove that he look'd upon that Book to be inspir'd. *St. Paul* quotes Passages out of *Aratus* and *Epimenides*, Heathen Writers, and mentions *Jannes* and *Jambres* out of some Jewish Book or ancient Tradition. An apocryphal Book may contain some things that are true, derived from more ancient Accounts, of which there had been several in that Nation, and those written by prophetic Men too, (though not taken into the sacred Canon) which are not now extant. And supposing *Jude* to have written under the Inspiration of the divine Spirit, he might easily distinguish a true Tradition from a false one; and might be directed to do it in this Instance, that so valuable a Remainder of the old patriarchal Religion might not be lost, but transmitted in his Epistle to succeeding Ages, and otherwise probably it would never have come down to us.

Our Author labours for some Pages, to shew, that the Apostles were grossly mistaken with relation to the *second coming of Christ* and the *End of the World*, which *they suppos'd would be in their own Days*, p. 259, &c. He says the best Commentators own this. And it is true that *Grotius* seems to be of this Opinion; but then he supposes that the Reason why they were mistaken in their Apprehensions of this Matter, was, because the divine Spirit reveal-

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* See Bishop *Sherlock's* Use and Intent of Prophecy, *Dissertation* 1.

ed nothing to them concerning the Time of Christ's coming at all, but left them to their own Conjectures. For our Saviour expressly says, that *of that Day and that Hour knoweth no Man, no nor the Angels of Heaven, but my Father only,* Matt. 24. 36. So that supposing the Apostles really thought the Day of the general Judgment, and the End of the World was very near, and to be in their own days, all that would follow from it is, that the Time of it was not revealed to them. And we can't wonder at this, since our Saviour tells them they should not know it, and that it was not for them to *know the Times and the Seasons.* But does it follow, that because they might be mistaken in things which were not revealed to them, therefore they might be mistaken in things which were revealed? This Writer indeed endeavours to prove, that they determined the Time of Christ's coming, as by a particular Revelation; and that *Paul* not only expected to be alive at Christ's coming, but had the Word of God for it. For which, he cites *1 Thes. 4. 15, 16, 17, 18.* For this *we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.—The Dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, &c.* He cites also, *1 Cor. 15. 51, 52. 2 Cor. 5. 4.* to the same purpose. But it is plain to any that considers those Passages, that all that the Apostle here delivers by *the Word of the Lord*, is not the Time of Christ's Appearance, of which he says nothing at all, but the Circumstances of it, that the Dead in Christ shall rise first, and that those that shall be then alive, shall not die at all, but shall be wonderfully changed, &c. As to his saying, *We which are alive*, where he seems to put himself among the Number of those

those that shall be found alive by Christ at his coming, all that are acquainted with *Paul's* Epistles know, that he uses this way of speaking in many Cases, where he cannot be supposed to include himself. It is, as if he had said, those of us Christians or Believers that shall be then alive, &c. for all true Christians in all Ages make up one mystical Body of Christ, one Society of which they are all Members, which renders this way of speaking agreeable and proper. But it is evident that he does not intend to determine who shall be then alive, but that whosoever they are, and whenever it shall be, they shall not prevent those that died before Christ's coming. This is the natural Meaning of this Passage, and all that can be concluded from it.

As to *Paul* himself, it appears from several Passages in his Epistles, that he himself did not expect to live till Christ's coming. He declares, *2 Cor. 4. 14. we believe and therefore speak, knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.* Where it is plain, that he expected that both he and they should be raised up from the Dead, and consequently should not be alive at Christ's coming. And therefore it cannot be the Intention of what he adds immediately after in the Passage cited by the Author, *2 Cor. 5. 4.* to signify that he should be alive at that time.

Supposing that the Apostle speaks concerning Christ's coming to the general Judgment, *1 Thes. 5. 2, 3, 4.* he only declares in general, that whenever it came, it should be with an unexpected Surprise. And in his second Epistle, *Chap. 2. v. 1, 2.* he expressly warns them, and that in an earnest manner, not to disturb themselves with the Apprehensions *that the Day of Christ was at hand.* And I suppose we may allow the
Apostle

Apostle to be the best Interpreter of his own Meaning. He talks indeed of the *Mystery of Iniquity's already working*, which some interpret of those who in the first Age taught the Doctrine of worshipping Angels, the Lawfulness of Idolatry, forbidding to marry, &c. in which they were the Fore-runners of the great Apostacy; but whatever be understood by it, certainly it could not be his Design to insinuate, that the time of Christ's Coming was at hand; since it is his manifest Intention in this whole Passage to warn them against such a Thought.

The Author produces several Texts to shew, that the Times of the Gospel are called the *last Days*, the *last Time*, the *End of the World*, the *Consummation of all Things*; but there can little Stress be laid upon this, because all that is intended by these Expressions is only to signify, that the Mosaick Œconomy, which was designed as preparatory to the Kingdom of the Messiah, was now at an end; and that the Gospel-Dispensation which Christ had introduced was the last and most perfect Dispensation, not to be succeeded by any other; he settled the Church on that Foundation, on which it was to continue till the time of his second Coming. And accordingly the Times of the Kingdom of the Messiah are still spoken of by the Prophets under the Character of the *last Days*. But how long this Dispensation under the Messiah was to last, and of how long Continuance these last Days were to be, was not revealed to them, nor is it any where determined in the New Testament. Only this may be observed, that as the New-Testament Writers frequently suppose that they were already entred on the last Days or the last Time, so they also sometimes represent those last Days as of a considerable Continuance, and speak of Things that should happen in the last Days

Days as of Things that were yet to come, and which might happen at a considerable distance of Time, 1 *Tim.* 4. 1. 2 *Tim.* 3. 1. 2 *Pet.* 3. 3.

When the Apostle *John* tells those to whom he writes, that this was the *last Time*, and that *many Antichrists were come into the World*, and intimates to them, that they had heard or that it had been told them beforehand that it should be so; see 1 *John* 2. 18. compared with 4. 1, 3. he probably refers to our Lord's own Prediction, that many *false Christs* and *false Prophets* should arise, about the time of his Coming to put the last Period to the Jewish Polity, *Matt.* 24. 5, 24. For this it is that our Saviour there evidently describes, where he gives such a graphical Description of the Calamities which the *Jews* were to suffer, of the Destruction of *Jerusalem* and of the Temple, which was not to have one Stone left upon another, (see also *Luke* 19. 44.) and the utter Subversion of their whole Nation, that whosoever compares the Prophecy as recorded by the Evangelists with the Event it self as described by *Josephus*, will be obliged to own, that never was there in the World a Prophecy more marvellous and more exactly accomplished. But our Author takes no notice of this, but would fain make it all pass for nothing else but a Description of the End of the World, or of Christ's coming to the general Judgment; though he himself elsewhere observes, that in Conformity to the Manner of speaking used by the Old Testament Prophets, *the Destruction of the City of Jerusalem in the New Testament is describ'd after such a Manner, as if Nature was unbind'd, and the Universe dissolving*, p. 333*. And to this Coming of Christ to destroy the Jewish Polity many of those Texts may justly be referred, that talk of the *Day of the Lord's being near*, and the *Coming of the Lord's drawing nigh*. Yet this Writer,

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* P. 302.

to give the better Colôur to his Pretences, all along takes it for granted, (though he knows it is denied) that as often as the *Coming of Christ* or *Day of the Lord* is mentioned in the New Testament, it is only to be understood of Christ's second Coming to judge the World.

Indeed with regard to Christ's Coming to the general Judgment, and the Account that all Men must give of themselves and of their Actions, and the Resurrection of the Dead, &c. though the Thing it self is frequently asserted, and described in the strongest Manner, because the Certainty of it was of great Importance to be known, yet the precise Time or particular Season of it was never revealed to the inspired Writers. For this was of small Consequence but to gratify a Curiosity; nay it was rather fit that they should not know the exact Time, that so they might live in a constant Preparation for it, and exhort others to do so; and as they did not know how far it was off, so they might talk of it in general as if it were at no great distance. Our Saviour expressly tells them, it was not for *them to know the Times and the Seasons*, &c. and checks their Curiosity, *Acts* 1. 7. though this Writer, by a strange Inference, would fain construe this into an Insinuation that it was to happen during their own Lives.

The Apostle *Peter* plainly supposes that it might be 1000 Years off, and yet be said to be near; since 1000 Years make no Alteration with respect to God as to the Fulfilment and Certainty of his Promise. This is all that is signified by that sublime Passage, which this Writer thinks proper to place in a ridiculous Light, that *one Day is with the Lord as a thousand Years, and a thousand Years as one Day*, 2 Pet. 3. 8. The plain Design of it, as also of that Passage to which it probably refers, *Psal.* 90. 4. is to signify, that the Differences of Time, which seem so great to us, are as nothing

to God; and therefore he may speak of a thing which to us, and in our way of Computation, is at a great distance, as very near, and even as if already done, to shew the absolute Certainty of it. And indeed supposing, which is really the Case, that at every Man's Death his State is determin'd, and that there is nothing further to be done in a way of Trial till the general Judgment, the Day of Judgment may be justly represented as near to every one of us; since this Life, which is the only Time of preparing for it, shall soon be at an end, and therefore we ought all of us to labour and be in a constant Readiness, as if the Judgment were at hand.

Among those Texts of Scripture, which the Author supposes to be contrary to what Reason tells us of the Nature and Perfections of God, we may reckon those he refers to, p. 335 *. where he tells us, that the Lord is said to have *created Evil*, Is. 45. 7. [which is to be understood only of his providential Influence in Afflictions, as has been shewn above, p. 231.] and to have *hardned Men's Hearts*, and then to punish them for their being hardned; and to *tempt Men*; for we are to pray against God's *leading us into Temptation*.

But since the Scripture every-where represents, in the strongest and noblest manner, God's spotless Purity and Holiness, and his absolute eternal Detestation of all moral Evil, and in numberless Passages clears him from having any hand in Men's Crimes, and charges their Sins and their Destruction wholly on themselves; any common Reader that compares the Scripture with itself, will be easily satisfied, that it cannot possibly be the Design of those Expressions to signify, that he is the Author of Men's Corruption and Wickedness, or that he himself seduces and impels them to Sin. And he

he that would interpret them thus, would force a Meaning upon them evidently contrary to the whole Tenor of the sacred Writings. Particularly the Scripture itself expressly warns us against entertaining such a Thought, as if God ever inclin'd and tempted Men to Sin. *Let no Man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man; but every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust and enticed,* Jam. i. 13, 14. When therefore we pray, *Lord, lead us not into Temptation*, the Design of it is plainly this, to pray that God would not suffer us to be tempted, that he would keep us from the Temptation, or enable us to overcome it. A noble Sense! and which, like the other Petitions in that Prayer, comprehends a great deal in a few words.

The Texts that speak of God's hardening Men's Hearts, cannot be understood to signify that God is the Author of their Corruption, or that he himself infused that Hardness into them; the Scripture itself (as I have just now observ'd) sufficiently secures us against such an Apprehension; but the manifest Intention of such Expressions is to signify, that where Sinners are already obstinate, and harden'd in their evil Courses, and have long resisted the Methods of his Grace, he in just Judgment abandons them to their own Obstinacy, and *gives them over to a reprobate Mind*, as the Apostle expresses it, *Rom. i. 28*. And if in his wise and righteous Providence he orders those Events and Circumstances, from whence he knows they will take occasion to harden themselves the more, and make their own Wickedness and Obstinacy more manifest; it is evident that in all these Cases the Hardness is really owing to Men themselves, and therefore there is no Injustice in God's punishing them for being harden'd.

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This Writer mentions it as a Difficulty in Scripture, that *the same Action is imputed to God and Satan*, for which he cites 2 Sam. 24. 1. 1 Chron. 21. 1. In the former of which Passages it is said, that *the Anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go number Israel and Judah*: In the latter it is said, *Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel*. But all that can be justly concluded from comparing these two Passages is this, that *Satan tempted David to number the People*, as it is expressly said in one Passage, and that God permitted this in a way of just Judgment, to whose righteous Providence it is ascrib'd in the other *. But no Man that reads and considers the Scripture, and takes his Notions of Religion from thence, can think that it is here intended that God, who we are expressly told *cannot be tempted of Evil, neither tempteth any Man*, and whose Purity and Hatred against Sin is every where so strongly and gloriously describ'd in Scripture, did himself impel David to this Sin; or that he, who is there every-where represented as the Author of all Good, the Friend and Parent of Mankind, *conspired with Satan in order to destroy a number of innocent Persons*, as this Author insinuates, p. 266 †.

This Passage may be illustrated by another, 2 Sam. 16. 10. where, when *Shimei* so bitterly reviled David, he makes this Reflection upon it, *So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David; who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?* No Reader of common Sense can suppose

* This is on supposition it had been expressly said in the Text of 2 Sam. 24. 1. That *God moved David*, &c. but after all there is no such thing said there. In the Original, the Verb *moved* is there put without any nominative Case at all, and it might, according to the Idiom of the Hebrew Language, be very properly rendered, *David was moved*, &c.

† P. 240.

suppose that it was *David's* Intention in these words to signify, that God had actually given *Shimei* an express Command to go and curse *David*, and that he did it in Obedience to that Command; for then he would never have charged it upon him as a grievous Crime, and have left it as an Injunction upon his Son *Solomon* to execute the Vengeance due to him for it, 1 *Kings* 2. 8. But the evident Intention of it is this, that though God did not put the Malice against *David* into *Shimei's* Heart, nor put those reviling Words into his Tongue, yet he so order'd Things in his most wise and righteous Providence, that *Shimei* had an Opportunity given him; there was a Concurrence of Circumstances, which through the Malice of his own Heart occasion'd him to break out into those vile Calumnies and Reproaches. And *David* like a wise and good Man, though he detested *Shimei's* Wickedness, look'd up higher to the over-ruling Agency of a supreme Providence, which most justly permitted and disposed this for his Chastisement. So in the present Case, God did not put *Satan* upon tempting *David*, or command him to do so; he only for wise Ends permitted him to act according to his Nature in soliciting *David* to sin: I say to solicit, not compel him; for *David* might still have resisted the Temptation, if he had done what was really in his own power. But God saw; that if left to himself he would actually fall into it, through his own Corruption, Pride, and Self-confidence, and yet saw fit to permit it, for the Punishment both of *David* himself and of a guilty People, who were ripe for Judgment. And the Justice of this I shall have occasion more particularly to vindicate in the next Chapter.

Upon the whole, the wonderful Influence of divine Providence in suffering Men to be tempted, in permitting and over-ruling their Sins, in giving

them up to their own Hardness and Obstinacy, and making one Sin a Punishment for another, and his making use even of the Malice of Satan and wicked Men (which he does not cause, but over-rules) for accomplishing his own most wise and righteous Designs, is all that is intended in the several Passages of Scripture produced by this Writer, and which have been already consider'd. These are Depths of Providence, and Instances of God's incomprehensible Wisdom in the Government of the World. There are Difficulties in them arising from the Narrowness of our Understandings, which at present take in but little of the Reasons and Methods of the divine Proceedure; but they are Difficulties not peculiar to the Scriptures; they are as great to those that have the Interests of natural Religion really at heart, and are urged by Atheists against a Providence. But they that believe and are govern'd by the Scriptures, are in no danger of entertaining hard Thoughts of God on the account of these things; since his Righteousness, his Equity, his Goodness, and Purity, at the same time that he is represented as exercising a constant Inspection and Government over all the Affairs and Events relating to Nations and particular Persons, is there asserted in the strongest manner.

I shall take notice before I conclude this Chapter of one Instance more, which this Writer mentions again and again, as if he thought there were a great deal in it. It is concerning the old Prophet at *Bethel*, that lyed to the Man of God that came from *Judah*, who was punish'd after a most signal manner for hearkening to the old Prophet's pretended Revelation; *whilst the lying Prophet himself was so far from being punish'd, that the Lord continued to him the Gift of Prophecy, nay pronounced by his Mouth the Doom of the Prophet he had so fatally deceived,* p. 245, 328*. It does not appear that the old

* P. 297, 298.

Prophet was a true Prophet of God at all ; his being call'd a Prophet does not prove this ; since even false Prophets were sometimes call'd Prophets, which was the Name they assum'd to themselves. But if he was a true Prophet of the Lord, that is, one that had on some Occasions been extraordinarily inspir'd, this does not prove, that therefore on no Occasion whatsoever he was capable of uttering a Falshood ; his lying was not when the Inspiration was upon him, for then he told the Truth, as appear'd by the Event. But whatever he was, or pretended to be, the Man of God from *Judah* was inexcusable for counter-acting an express and peremptory Order, which he well knew he had received from God himself, merely upon another Man's pretending he had received a Counter-order, and for which he had no Proof at all but his own Word. And if it seem'd fit to God to punish him for this in a signal manner, there is nothing in this but what was very just.

And God might extraordinarily make use of that pretended Prophet (even supposing him a false one) to publish the Doom of the other ; in which Case his Gift of Prophecy was not *continued* to him, (as the Author speaks) but he was on that occasion extraordinarily inspir'd to foretell the other's Punishment. And there seem'd to be a particular Congruity in this, that his Doom should be pronounced by the Mouth of him to whom he had given Credit, contrary to the express Command of God himself.

It is scarce worth while to observe, that this Writer produces some Passages out of the Law of *Moses*, which he pretends, taken literally, would lead the Vulgar to think that *Moses* was a God, p. 331 *. I shall not trifle with the Reader so far as to enter on a particular Examination of the

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Texts

Texts he alledges to this purpose, since it is impossible for any Man of common Sense that reads the Law of *Moses*, which every where so strongly asserts that there is no God but one, and which represents the Faults and Infirmities of *Moses* himself, and ascribes all he did not to himself, but wholly to the Power of God, in whose Name and by whose Authority he acted, should understand the Passages he mentions in the Sense he thinks proper to put upon them. Nor did any one among the *Jews* (however stupid this Author sometimes represents them) ever take it so, or conclude from thence that *Moses* was a Deity. But this Gentleman, when he has a mind to expose the Scripture, is for taking every Word and Phrase singly and separately, without considering the Scope and Design, as it stands in a Connection with what goes before and follows after ; at which rate he may put what Absurdities he pleases upon any Book in the World.

In these and other Instances, there needs no recourse to what the Author calls the Reason and Nature of Things to interpret Scripture, and force a Sense upon it contrary to the Scripture itself ; for it has been shewn, that the Scripture itself directs us to the true Interpretation. Indeed if by a Man's having recourse to the Reason of Things he only means, that every Man in reading the Scripture is supposed to have the Exercise of Reason and common Sense in order to understand it, this will be easily granted ; but it does not follow, that because Reason and common Sense is necessary for understanding the Scripture and every Book in the World, that therefore Reason and common Sense can alone inform us of every thing that the Scripture or any Book whatsoever can teach us : yet this seems to be the Strain of the Author's arguing.



CHAP. XII.

An Examination of those Instances whereby the Author pretends to prove, that there are Things either commanded or approved of in the Scripture, which tend to lead Men astray in relation to the Duties they owe to one another.

THE Author having endeavour'd to shew, that there are many Things in Scripture contrary to what our Reason tells us of the Nature and Perfections of God, proceeds to shew, that "in relation to the Duties Men owe to one another, if they are not well grounded in the Nature and Reason of Things, and from thence judge of their Duty, there are Things either commanded or approved of in Scripture, which might be apt to lead them astray," p. 262 *, &c.

And here it ought to be remark'd, that this Writer does not pretend to produce any Laws of Scripture that are contrary to the Rules of Justice and Equity, which yet would be the natural way, if he was able to do it; but he mentions some Instances of Faults in good Men, or some Facts and Cases of an extraordinary Nature, which he thinks have a Tendency to mislead the People. But whilst the moral Precepts, which alone are to be the Rule of our Conduct, are pure and excellent, and manifestly prescribe a most just and equitable Conduct towards our Neighbours and all Mankind, they are sufficient to secure any diligent honest Reader of the Scripture, from being led aside by the Faults of good Men, and from making a wrong

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Use

* P. 236.

Use of any extraordinary Cases that are there recorded.

Our Author with great Diligence rakes together whatever he can find against some of the most illustrious Characters in Scripture, particularly against *Abraham*; against whom, for what Reason I know not, he seems to have particular Prejudice. But if the Charges he brings against *Abraham* were true, it would only follow that he was guilty of Faults, which will be easily allow'd. And the recording his Faults, and those of other good Men, is a signal Proof of the Impartiality of the sacred Historians. But we are no where commanded to imitate good Men in their Faults, or to make their Examples our Patterns, any farther than they are conformable to the Scripture-Precepts, which alone are the proper Rule of our Practice. But it were easy to shew, that some of the Charges that this Writer is pleas'd to advance against *Abraham*, are far from being just or well-founded; nor indeed are they consistent with one another. Thus, he directly charges *Abraham* with lying to *Abimelech*, p. 329*. and yet he also charges him with an incestuous Marriage, his Wife being his Sister by the Father's Side, p. 243†. Now these Charges are not consistent. For if *Sarah* was *Abraham's* Sister, [in whatever Sense this is to be understood, whether his half Sister, or his Niece the Daughter of *Haran*, and Grand-Daughter of *Terah*, for the word Brother and Sister, as well as Son and Daughter, had a much greater Latitude then, than it has among us.] *Abraham* told no lye in saying to *Abimelech* that she was so. All that can be said in this case is, that he did not tell all the Truth. And is this Author, who elsewhere makes such large Allowances for Falshood, (and who therefore, could not consistently blame *Abraham*, if he had told

* P. 298.

† P. 219.

told a Lye when his Life was in danger) now on a sudden grown so very scrupulous, as not to allow Persons to conceal any part of the Truth, when it might be dangerous to divulge it?

There is indeed another Crime which he charges him with, which if it were true, would be a very scandalous one, and that is, *endeavouring to betray his Wife's Chastity to two Kings, in disowning her to be his Wife, by which Conduct, he got considerable Presents* from them both, 244 *, 329. A signal Instance this of our Author's Candour, who boldly and maliciously charges a Man of *Abraham's* Character, the Fame of whose Virtues reach'd the Heathens, and who was celebrated and admir'd through all the East, as he still is, with such a deliberate piece of Baseness and Villainy, as scarce any but the worst of Men could be guilty of, and this without the least Foundation in the Story to support it. The plain naked Matter of Fact is only this, as appears by comparing *Gen. 12. 11, 12, 13.* with *Gen. 20. 2, 11, 12.* that *Abraham* being a Stranger in a foreign Country, and his Wife a beautiful Woman, and the *Egyptians* and *Canaanites* very dissolute, he was afraid, lest if he acknowledged her for his Wife, they would murder him for her sake, that they might more freely enjoy her; he therefore conceal'd his being her Husband, which he thought would only expose his own Life without securing her Chastity, and call'd her his Sister, or near Relation, as the word often signifies, which she really was. This was a Weakness, but a quite different thing from endeavouring to betray his Wife's Chastity for Hire, as this candid Writer thinks proper to represent it. *Pharaoh* indeed, out of the Regard he had for *Sarah*, was kind to *Abraham*, whom he thought to be her Brother, and made him great Presents; and *Abraham*

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could

could not refuse them, without discovering himself to be her Husband, which was what he avoided for the Reason already mention'd; but God in Mercy prevented the Mischief he fear'd, and delivered *Sarah*. As to the Presents made to *Abraham* by *Abimelech*, which this Writer also represents as a Reward, or Hire, given to *Abraham* for betraying his Wife's Chastity, there is still less Pre-
tence for such a malicious Insinuation in this Case, than in the former; because *Abimelech* made *Abraham* no Present till after he had dismiss'd *Sarah* without touching her; and it is plain, it was only given to *Abraham* as a Prophet, whom he regarded as highly favour'd of God, for which reason he also enter'd into a League or Covenant with him, *Gen.* 20. 14, 15, 21, 22, 23.

But our Author thinks it hard, that *Abimelech* should be punish'd, and not pardon'd till *Abraham* the offending Person pray'd for him, &c. But I don't see how *Abraham* could be said to offend *Abimelech*. He did not put *Sarah* upon him. He only said she was his Sister, which was true, and *Abimelech* might have let her alone notwithstanding; in which Case there would have been no Harm done on either side. It is probable indeed, that *Abimelech* (who seems to have been a Man of Virtue) if he had known she was his Wife, would neither have attempted her Chastity, nor done hurt to *Abraham* for her sake. But *Abraham* did not know this. He knew the *Canaanites* were extremely dissolute (as appears from the Example of the *Sodomites*) and being a stranger to *Abimelech*, fear'd the Effects of his Lust and Tyranny; for he said, *Surely there is no Fear of God in this place*. This induced him to conceal his being *Sarah's* Husband, which he probably would not have done, if he had known *Abimelech* then as well as he did afterwards. The Plagues inflicted on *Abimelech*, which this Writer

ter thinks so hard and unjust, were of a short duration, and sent him in Mercy to restrain him from an Act of Injustice, as God himself let him know, *Gen.* 20. 6. and might be a Warning to him for the future, and make him more cautious in taking a strange Woman merely because she was beautiful, which was a Conduct not very justifiable. God's removing this Plague at *Abraham's* Prayer, which this Gentleman finds fault with, had a manifest Propriety in it, as it tended to procure a greater Regard to his faithful Servant in a strange Country, into which he had come by a signal Act of Faith and in Obedience to God's own express Command; and accordingly this Effect it really had, as we find by the great Respect and Kindness *Abimelech* shew'd him.

This Gentleman, who seems resolved at any rate to expose *Abraham*, thinks proper further to represent him as disbelieving or doubting of God's Promise, even after it is said, that *he believed God, and his Faith was counted to him for Righteousness*, p. 244 *. for which he cites *Gen.* 15. 6, 8. where no such thing appears. He charges him also as guilty of a very barbarous Action to *Hagar*, and the Son he had by her, p. 329. though it is plain what he did in this Matter, was not from his own Inclinations, for it was very *grievous in his sight*, *Gen.* 21. 11, 12. but by the special Command of God himself, who had assur'd him that he would take care of *Ismael*, and make of him a great Nation; which Promise *Abraham*, whose Faith was very eminent, firmly believed. And accordingly this Promise was signally accomplish'd, for God preserved and bless'd *Ismael* in a remarkable manner.

Other Instances which this Writer produces are of such a nature, that he can't reasonably find fault with them, if he be consistent with himself.

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* P. 219.

He allows Persons to tell Falshoods whenever it is for their Convenience to do so, and answers any good Ends either to themselves or others, [see this at large shewn in the first Part, p. 194, &c.] particularly he allows Persons to deceive the Sick, and Men in Passion, for their Good ; and yet makes it a very great Crime in *Jacob*, to deceive his old Father *Isaac*, that he might obtain the Blessing. This is the first Instance he produces after proposing to shew, that the Scripture leads Men wrong in relation to the Duties they owe to one another, p. 263 *. And yet *Jacob* acted in this Matter, by the Direction of his Mother *Rebecca*, who probably went on our Author's Principle, that it was lawful to deceive for so good an End. She knew that it had been foretold, whilst the Children were yet in her Womb, that *the Elder should serve the Younger*, Gen. 25. 23. and therefore she look'd upon it as the Will of God himself, that the Blessing should be *Jacob's*. *Esau* had sold his Birth-right to him as a Thing he did not value, and had proved disobedient to both his Parents, Gen. 26. 35, 36. Yet she knew *Isaac's* Partiality towards him was so great, that probably it would sway him to give *Esau* the Preference. She thought therefore, it was lawful to deceive him in order to prevent his doing a wrong thing, viz. his giving the Blessing to one that did not deserve it, contrary to the declared Will of God. I don't see but this Author ought to acquit her upon his Principles, and *Jacob* too, who acted by her Direction. But the Scripture is far from approving such Methods of Deceit. *Rebecca* might have been sure God would have found a way to fulfil his own Purpose and Counsel without her Fraud. Nor is God's confirming the Blessing *Isaac* gave, a Proof that he approved the Method in which it was obtain'd, as
this

* P. 236.

this Writer insinuates. *Isaac*, by pronouncing the Blessing upon *Jacob*, though contrary to his own Intention, only executed the divine Decree which God had appointed before, and which he did not see fit to revoke, though a wrong Method had been used by *Rebecca* and *Jacob* to obtain it.

The Strength of several other Instances which this Author mentions, depends intirely upon his own Misrepresentation. Thus he tells us, that *Rahab* is celebrated even in the New Testament, for lying to the Government, and betraying her Country to its most cruel Enemies, p. 263*. for which he cites *Heb.* 11. 31. *Jam.* 2. 25. But all that she is there commended for is her Faith. And this is sufficiently evident from the noble Confession she made, *Josh.* 2. 9, 10, 11. whereby it appears, that she had abandon'd the Idolatry of her Country, and believed and acknowledged the only living and true God; and that she was perswaded that it was his Decree, that the *Israelites* should possess the Land of *Canaan*. And when she thought so, to have discovered the Spies would have been to act contrary to what she knew and believed to be the Will of Heaven: and she would have exposed herself without saving her Country. Her Faith therefore, of which she gave so manifest a Proof, is commended, and very justly, but it does not follow that the Lye she told is also approved. This was an Instance of Frailty which this Gentleman ought to forgive her, since she did it for what she look'd upon to be a very good End, viz. the saving her own Life, and the Lives of those whom she thought it was the Will of God to preserve.

It is very hard to acquit this Writer from gross and wilful Misrepresentation, when he represents some Actions as approved of in Scripture, which are evidently condemned there. Of this kind is the

the Cruelty and Treachery of *Simeon* and *Levi* towards the *Schechemites*, which is condemned in the strongest manner, and with the greatest Solemnity. Their *Anger* is declared to be *curst*, and their *Wrath* cruel. A solemn Brand is left upon Record on the *cruel* Actors, pronounced by the Mouth of dying *Jacob* himself, when under a prophetic Inspiration. And if the *Terror of God* was upon the *Cities round about them*, so that they did not pursue the *Sons of Jacob*, Gen. 35. 5. supposing this to be understood as the Author would have it, of a Terror sent by God upon them; it can only signify that God restrain'd them from avenging it, lest *Jacob* himself and his whole Family should be destroy'd, which was what he was afraid of; Gen. 34. 30. So that it was design'd only for the Protection of an innocent and excellent Person, who was no way accessary to the Fact, but sincerely abhorred it. But after all, that Expression, *the Terror of God* was upon them, may signify no more than that a great Terror was upon them; for it is a common Observation, that in Scripture-Language the word *God* is often added to Things, only to heighten their Signification, as the *Mountains of God* signify great Mountains. So that the Meaning may only be, that the *Canaanites* were struck with great Terror at the Power, the Courage and Fierceness of the *Sons of Jacob*, and therefore thought it best to let them alone.

There is another Passage which I would pass over in Silence, were it not to shew the Spirit of the Author. He insinuates, that if Persons were to govern themselves by Scripture, "they might approve of *Tamar's* Stratagem in getting to lie with her Father-in-law, upon discovering which *Judab* cried out, *She has been more righteous than I*, and for this *Righteousness* she was bless'd with Twins, from whom the noble House of

" *Judab*

“*Judab* and the Messiah himself descended,” p. 276*. But is any Man that reads the Scripture in danger of concluding from this Instance, that Adultery or Incest or Fornication is lawful, which is every-where forbidden in the strongest manner? We should be much more in danger if left merely to the *Reason of Things*, to which this Gentleman here thinks fit to send us, at least if we must take his own Account of it, which leaves Things of this nature sufficiently at large to every Man’s own Discretion; see Part I. p. 203. All that any common Reader can understand by those Expressions of *Judab*, *She is more righteous than I*, is not that it was his Intention to signify, that either of them was innocent; but that, as the matter was circumstanced, he was more to be blam’d than she, who had broken his solemn Promise to her, and afterwards condemn’d her to be burnt for a Crime which he himself had given occasion to. But to insinuate (as this Writer does) that *Tamar*’s Action was so meritorious in the sight of God, that for this Righteousness, as he calls it, *she was blessed with Twins, from whom the Messiah himself at length descended*, is an Instance of Misrepresentation exceeding almost what can be any where met with, or even in this Author. So I suppose whenever any Children are born as the Fruit of an incestuous or adulterous Copulation, it must be said that this is design’d as a Reward of that Adultery or Incest, and a certain Mark of the Approbation of Heaven. I can see nothing in such a way of talking but a profane Banter on all Religion, and an impious Attempt to expose and vilify Divine Providence.

Other Instances which this Author produces, as apt to lead Men astray, relate to Actions which I am apt to think, if done by others than *Israelites*, or if recorded in any other Writings but the Scriptures,

tures, he would have applauded and admir'd. Such was *Ehud's* killing *Eglon* King of the *Moabites*. A foreign Prince had oppress'd and enslaved the *Israelites*, under whose cruel Yoke they groan'd many Years; *Ehud* deliver'd his Country by killing the Oppressor in his own House, and among his Guards. A bold Action! and which this Gentleman and his Friends would probably have extolled in a *Greek* or a *Roman*, as an heroick Attempt to hazard his own Life for rescuing his Country from Slavery and Oppression. But when done by a *Jew*, the Case is alter'd; though he had this further to warrant him, a Commission from God himself, who rais'd him up to be a Judge and a Deliverer of his People. But says our Author, "The Popish Priests pleaded this as a Precedent for the Assassination of the two *Henries* of *France*. And had the *Gunpowder-Plot* succeeded here, they would no doubt have made use of the same Plea to justify it," p. 264 *. This proves nothing, except he advances it as a Principle, that all Actions are to be condemn'd which wicked Men may abuse, and pretend to plead in Justification of their Crimes; a Principle which would condemn the noblest Actions in the World. This Gentleman would not think it a good Argument, that a King ought not to be resisted, when endeavouring to subvert the Constitution, because others may wrongfully plead this Precedent for Rebellion and Insurrection against a good Prince, who governs according to Law. Is it any Argument, that because a Man whom God himself immediately rais'd up and commissioned for that purpose, kill'd a foreign Tyrant that had enslav'd his Country, therefore others without any such Command or Commission from God, should murder their lawful King, and that not for oppressing the People, but for

* P. 237.

for not destroying their Fellow-Subjects; which was the Case of the Popish Assassinations of the two *Henries* of France?

I am apt to think, that if *Jael's* Action had been celebrated in the *Greek* or *Roman* Story, instead of calling it, as he does, *an Act of the highest Treachery*, p. 263 *. he would have found it worthy of Admiration. I ask, whether if *Jael* had been an *Israelitish* Lady, he would not have thought it worthy to be celebrated as a piece of Heroism in her, to slay him who was the grand Instrument in oppressing and enslaving her Country? And if she had made use of a little Deceit in order to it, this Gentleman that so much applauds the Stratagems and Deceits used in War, and thinks it lawful to deceive Tyrants, and to lye for the publick Good, yea and for a Man's own private Convenience, p. 347 †. could not reasonably find fault with her for endeavouring to deceive him for so great a Good.

But perhaps the Case is alter'd, because *Jael* was not an *Israelite*. But if she was of a People in Amity with the *Israelites*, that worshipped the same God, and were incorporated into the same Nation and Religion, it amounts to the same thing. Now this was really the Case. The *Kenites*, of whom she was, were, as appears from several Passages in Scripture, always on good Terms with the *Israelites*. They were descended from *Hobab*, *Moses's* Father-in-law; invited to enter with the *Israelites* into the Land of *Canaan*, and admitted to part of their Inheritance; see and compare *Numb.* 10. 32. *Judg.* 4. 11. They were accordingly settled among the Tribe of *Judah*, *Judg.* 1. 16. *Heber* indeed, (whose Wife *Jael* was) and his Family, separated from the rest of the *Kenites*, for what reason we are not told, but still they dwelt among the *Israelites*;

* P. 237.

† P. 314, 315.

raelites ; for they settled in the Tribe of *Naphtali*, *Judg.* 4. 11.

'Tis true we are told, that *there was Peace between Jabin King of Hazor, and the House of Heber the Kenite*, *Judg.* 4. 17. but this does not prove, that there was a League between them. Nor is it probable, that such People as the *Kenites*, who lived quiet and retired in their Tents, and made no Profession of Arms, would trouble themselves to enter into Leagues with Princes. All that is signified by this Expression is, that *Jabin* let them alone to live quietly in their Tents, he did not commit any Acts of Hostility against them, or oppress and enslave them as he did the *Israelites*. Thus we are told, *1 Sam.* 7. 14. that *there was Peace between Israel and the Amoritcs in the days of Samuel* ; not a League ; for this *Samuel* would not have suffered, which was expressly forbidden in the Law of God ; but there was no War between them, no Acts of Hostility, they were quiet on both sides. Indeed it would have been very ill done of the *Kenites* to have made a League with the great Enemy and Oppressor of the *Israelites* ; and if they had done so, certainly *Jael's* Tent would have been a very improper Place for *Sisera* to hide himself in from the Pursuit of the *Israelites* ; but as the *Kenites* were not at war with *Jabin*, who had suffer'd them to live in Peace, and at the same time were on good Terms with the *Israelites*, so he thought he might be safe in their Tents, and that the *Israelites* would not use any violent Methods to search them, as they certainly would have done if the *Kenites* had been in a Confederacy with the *Canaanites*.

This being the State of the Case, *Sisera* took refuge in her Tent. She entertain'd him civilly, and in some measure becoming his Quality. It does not appear that when he first came into her
Tent,

Tent, she had any Intention to kill him. It is probable that this was a sudden extraordinary Resolution she form'd as he lay asleep, when she saw the great Oppressor in her Hands, a most unjust Instrument of arbitrary Power, who had done very signal Acts of Cruelty and Oppression. For *Jabin*, and under him *Sisera*, had for *twenty Years mightily oppressed the Children of Israel*, Judg. 4. 3. so that the *Highways were unoccupied, the Travelers walk'd through By-ways, and the Inhabitants of the Villages ceased in Israel*, Judg. 5. 6, 7. The *Kenites*, though not then under the same Oppression, ought not because they were at Ease themselves, to have beheld the Misery of the *Israelites* (to whom they were bound by so many Ties of Religion and Friendship) with Unconcern. It was their Duty to contribute what lay in their power to their Deliverance. These were *Jael's* Sentiments, the Arguments of a great and noble Mind. She thought therefore she could not do a greater Service to the Publick and to the Cause of God, than by dispatching the grand Enemy, to put an end to the War and Oppression at once. And what probably put her upon doing it with her own Hands whilst he was asleep, was, that she was afraid that he might awake and make his Escape before the Pursuers came. When *Deborah* therefore celebrated the glorious Victory over *Sisera* and the Host of the *Canaanites*, it was very proper to mention this Deed of *Jael*, who by so extraordinary an Action had compleated the Deliverance of *Israel*. If there was any thing culpable in some Circumstances of the Action, yet the Affection she shew'd to *Israel*, her Zeal for the publick Good and the common Cause, her Hatred of Oppression and Tyranny, her Courage and Fortitude so much above her Sex, deserved the highest Encomiums; so that it was not without Cause that *Deborah* pronounced

her *Blessed above Women*, that is, celebrated above her Sex.

There are other Instances produced by this Writer, which perhaps may seem at first view to have something in them not so easily accounted for ; and yet if consider'd with all their Circumstances, as related in the sacred Writings, admit of a full Justification.

Such is the Instance of the *Israelites* spoiling the *Egyptians* ; which this Writer represents in the most odious Colours his Malice could suggest. He just chuses out what he thinks the shocking part of the Story, and leaves out all that would justify the Fact, and shew the Reason of such a Proceedure. If he had fairly told of the long and cruel Oppression the *Israelites* had groan'd under ; that though they were a free People, that were invited into *Egypt* upon fair Terms of Hospitality, and had obtain'd a Grant of a Province to settle in, *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians*, without any Rebellion or Insurrection so much as pretended, endeavoured to extirpate them by destroying their Male Children as soon as they were born, and afterwards continued to treat them with the utmost Rigour and Inhumanity, and made their Lives bitter with cruel Bondage ; that this barbarous and unjust Treatment continued for a long time under several Kings, and no Hope of Deliverance. If he had fairly told this, it would have appeared, that God's so remarkably interposing for the *Israelites*, and his bringing them out of *Egypt* with the Spoils of their Oppressors, was in Vindication of oppressed Innocence, and of a poor injur'd People wrongfully enslav'd, and treated with the utmost Rigour and Barbarity ; and his punishing *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians*, was only executing a signal Act of Justice upon Tyranny and Cruelty ; a glorious Monument to all succeeding Generations, and which should

should make us cry out, when we consider it, as the *Israelites* did then, *Who is like unto thee, O Lord, who is like unto thee, glorious in Holiness, fearful in Praises, working Wonders?*

But let us more particularly consider this Writer's Objections. He first mentions the Case more briefly, p. 263*. and afterwards returns to it again, p. 348, 349†. where he spares nothing that he thinks may expose it.

He first insinuates, that here is a *Precedent* for Lying and Prevarication authorized by God himself, *which seems*, says he, *very surprizing*. But I don't see why this Gentleman ought to be surprized at it, if there had been a Falshood for so good an End, as delivering a whole Nation from the most cruel Bondage, since he thinks that in such a Case, a Lye is not only lawful but commendable. But God is far from standing in need of such base Methods as Lying and Falshood, to bring about his own most wise Purposes; nor is there any thing like it in the Case here mention'd. How does this Writer prove it? "The Lord, though he told "*Moses*, and the Elders of *Israel*, his real Design "*of bringing his People out of Egypt into the "*Land of the *Canaanites*, *Exod.* 3. 8, 18. yet "*bids them say to the King of Egypt, Let us go "*three Days Journey into the Wilderness, that "*we may sacrifice to the Lord our God, &c.* "*Exod.* 5. 3, 8, 26." But is there any Inconsistency between these? he knew *Pharaoh* would not let the People go, and told *Moses*, and bid him tell the *Israelites* so, *Exod.* 3. 18, 19. But in order to render him the more inexcusable, first tries him with a moderate Request, that he would allow him to go three Days Journey into the Wilderness, and there sacrifice to God, and perform the Ceremonies of their Religion, which they were

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not

* P. 237.

† P. 316.

not suffer'd to do in *Egypt*. All this was true, God had commanded them to go to *Sinai*, *Exod.* 3. 12. (which was but three Days Journey into the Wilderness, if they had taken the direct Way) and to sacrifice and serve him there. God therefore commanded *Moses* to reveal part of his Counsel and Design to *Pharaoh*, but not the whole, which there was no necessity to do, and which only would have given him a greater Pretence for refusing it. Yet even this Request he would not grant; and when once he seem'd to allow them to go *into the Wilderness a little way*, *Exod.* 8. 28. yet as soon as the Plague that then afflicted him, was removed, he refused to let them go at all. Thus he hardened his Heart, and God justly gave him up to his own Hardness and Obstinacy, and sent Infatuation into his Counsels as he had deserved. At last indeed, when the First-born of the *Egyptians* were destroy'd, he bid the *Israelites* get *them gone from among his People, with their Flocks and Herds, &c.* *Exod.* 12. 32. which they did accordingly.

But our Author further objects, that "*upon this occasion, they borrowed of the Egyptians, as the Lord ordered them, Jewels of Gold and Silver, and Raiment, even to the spoiling of them.*" He repeats this Thought twice, for he had observed the same thing before, p. 273*. But I put the Case, that the *Israelites* had, under their grievous and unparallel'd Oppression, risen up in defence of their Liberties, and under the Command of some heroic Leader, fought their Way out of *Egypt*, and in a just Retribution for the Tyrannies and Exactions laid upon them, had spoil'd their Oppressors, and march'd out of the inhospitable Country with the Spoils, I can see nothing in this, but what the Law of Nature allows and justifies; and I am apt to think, if any other Nation but the

* P. 237.

the *Jews* had done so in their Circumstances, this Gentleman, far from finding fault with them, would have extolled their Magnanimity and Zeal for Liberty, and would have judged their Leader worthy of immortal Honour. And is it to be found fault with, because God order'd them to make Reprizals on the Nation that oppress'd them, when a General might have done so without a Crime? or that it was done in a mild and gentle way, rather than by open Force and Violence? It was the Will of God, that the *Israelites* should not go naked and empty away, but should take along with them part of the Riches and Wealth of *Egypt*, the Country where they had been so cruelly oppressed, and which they had for so long a time enrich'd with their hard Labours, without receiving any Recompence for them; but it was also his Will that this should be done in a gentle way; that they should ask the *Egyptians* civilly for them, and receive them with their Good-will. The word *Sbaal*, which our Translators render to borrow, properly signifies, to ask of a Person whether to lend or give. It does not appear that the *Hebrews* promised Restitution at all; all that is design'd by this Expression of their asking or borrowing of the *Egyptians*, is only to shew, that they did not take away their Goods by Force and Violence. When therefore the *Israelites* are said to have spoiled the *Egyptians*, all that can be understood by it, if we consider and compare the whole Story, is no more than this, that the *Israelites* carried away the Presents the *Egyptians* made them, which were so great, that it look'd like a spoiling the Country. We are told, that the Lord gave the *Israelites* Favour in the sight of the *Egyptians*, *Exod.* 3. 21, 22. 11. 3, 12, 36. They probably were sensible of the great Injustice that had been done them, and observing the remarkable Favour God had shewn

them (which made *Pharaoh* himself desire *Moses* and *Aaron* to bless him, *Exod.* 12. 32.) thought that the being liberal to the *Israelites*, was the best way to draw down a Blessing upon themselves; and many of them, it's probable, very freely contributed out of their own Substance to worship the God of *Israel*, of whose Power they had seen such illustrious Proofs.

And now we may easily judge what Foundation there is, for this Author's spiteful Reflection: That *when Pharaoh found that this solemn Sacrifice was a mere Pretence, and that they really fled with all they had borrowed of his People, he pursued the Fugitives; and the Consequence was, that the Egyptians, instead of obtaining Restitution, were miraculously destroy'd, and Pharaoh lost his Life, as well as his Subjects; and those who had dealt thus treacherously with him, were as miraculously preserved.* But it does not appear that the *Egyptians*, who had parted with their Jewels, either expected or demanded Restitution. But it was *Pharaoh* and his Servants, the Ministers and Instruments of his Cruelty and Tyranny, that pursued the *Israelites*, not (as the Author alledges) *because they fled with what they borrowed from his People*, but because he was loth to be deprived of the Service of so many useful Slaves. *Pharaoh* and his Servants said, *Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?* *Exod.* 14. 5. Accordingly no sooner were they gone, and before they had got into the Wilderness, whither he himself had allow'd them to go, but he pursued them with a Resolution either utterly to destroy them, or to bring them back to their former Servitude again; a most unjust and impious Design, and which shew'd an absolute Defiance of Heaven, after all the glorious Interpositions of Divine Providence which *Pharaoh* himself was witness to in favour of
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the *Israelites*. But this candid and righteous Author, this mighty Friend to Liberty and to Mankind, is not ashamed here to stand up an Advocate for Tyranny and Cruelty. He would have had the Tyrant and the Instruments of his arbitrary Power, that had so long kept a free People under the most cruel Bondage for their own Gain, he would have these saved; and the poor People that only fled from his Tyranny, he would have these destroy'd, or given up again to their unjust Oppressors; and finds fault with God for not sparing the Oppressors, and for not destroying an innocent People that had groan'd under a Series of Cruelties and Exactions scarce to be parallel'd in History.

As to his Fears, that this may be a Precedent to others; if none imitate the Conduct of the *Israelites* towards the *Egyptians*, but whose Case is parallel to theirs, and who have the same Warrant that they had, I see no hurt can arise from their doing as they did; and if others pretend to imitate them, when their Circumstances are quite different, and when they have not those things to plead for themselves, which justified the *Israelites* in what they did, I don't think the Scriptures are answerable for it.

The other Instances produced by this Author to shew that the Scripture tends to lead Men wrong in the Duties they owe to one another, relate to extraordinary Judgments, which are there represented to have been inflicted on guilty Nations; and that either by the more immediate Hand of Heaven, as the Famine sent on *Israel* for the Crime of *Saul* in slaying the *Gibeonites*; and the Pestilence in the Days of *David*, for his Crime in numbering the People; or by the Hands of Men as Executioners of the divine Vengeance, as in the Destruction of the *Canaanites* by the *Israelites*, and

of the *Amalekites* by *Saul*. I shall consider what he offers with regard to each of these.

And 1st. Some of the Cases mention'd by this Writer, relate only to publick Calamities or extraordinary Judgments, inflicted by the immediate Hand of Heaven, as the Famine and Pestilence. And what he seems to blame here is, that in the Cases he refers to, innocent Persons were punished for Crimes they were not guilty of.

I must own I can't help thinking the Author's Objections on this Head very extraordinary. It cannot possibly be denied, that from time to time signal Calamities have happen'd in the World, whether by Famine, Pestilence, Deluges, &c. that have occasioned great Devastations, and have taken away the Lives of Persons of both Sexes, and of all Ages and Conditions and Characters. Now either it must be said, that Providence had nothing to do in these things at all, and this would be to deny a Providence, which this Author has not yet thought fit to do, since if it does not concern itself in Things of such Consequence to Mankind, and on which the Lives and Fortunes of so many thousands depend, it does not concern itself about Mankind at all; or if the Influence of a governing Providence be acknowledged in these Things, it must be said that they were sent and ordered by God either in a way of absolute Dominion, as he is the sovereign Lord of the Lives of all his Creatures, and can cut them short as he pleases, those of Infants as well as others; or that he sends them in a way of Judgment for Sin; and if he can do the former, as he certainly can, much more may he justly do the latter. And indeed Nature and Reason have generally taught Mankind to regard these publick Calamities as the Judgments of Heaven sent to chastise guilty Nations; in which Case it usually happens, that some good Persons among

among the Adult, as well as many Infants, are involved in the common Calamity.

This Writer indeed is pleased to represent this Proceedure as *contrary to the eternal Rules of Justice*, and as a *breaking in upon the common Course of Nature*, and the *ordinary Rules of Providence*, to *punish Men for Crimes they were not guilty of*, p. 266 *. But this Objection lies not so much against Scripture as against Providence, which undeniably (supposing it concern'd in human Affairs at all) takes those very Methods which this Gentleman so boldly arraigns and condemns.

Indeed with respect to publick national Calamities, as such, this World is the only State for inflicting them, because those Communities only subsist here, and therefore can only be rewarded or punish'd as Communities in this present State. And if the punishing them may bring many Hardships to particular Persons who were not properly concern'd in those Crimes that brought the publick Calamities upon the Nation or Community to which they belonged, we may be sure both from Reason and the express Declarations of Scripture, that God will cause even these Evils, the Loss of Goods, and Death itself, to turn to their Advantage and Gain. So that if we take in a future World into the Account, there shall be a vast Difference made between the Innocent and the Guilty, though here for the wise Ends of his Providence they are sometimes involved in the common Ruin. This Gentleman indeed thinks proper to ask, "How could we be sure, if God deals thus with his Creatures in this Life, he will not act so in the Life to come; since if the eternal Rules of Justice are once broken, how can we imagine any Stop?" He first takes it for granted, that God's inflicting any Calamities in this Life, in which the Innocent
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and Righteous are involved with the Guilty (as it is in all publick Calamities) is contrary to the eternal Rules of Justice ; which for my part I can regard in no other View than as a bold and impious arraigning divine Providence ; and then he asks, “ If God deals thus with his Creatures in this Life, “ how can we be sure, he will not act so in the “ Life to come ? ” He might as well have said, If the Wicked often prosper, and the Righteous are often exposed to great Hardships and Sufferings in this Life, how can we be sure but the Wicked may be eternally happy, and the Righteous eternally miserable ? whereas the Argument holds the other way, that since there is often no visible Distinction put in the Methods of divine Providence between the Righteous and the Wicked, the Innocent and Guilty in this Life, we may be sure there is a future State of Retributions, wherein there shall be a manifest Distinction between them, and the one shall be gloriously rewarded, and the other severely punish’d.

With respect to the particular Instances of publick Calamities the Author here refers to, *viz.* the Famine sent on *Israel* for *Saul’s* Crime in slaying the *Gibeonites*, and that in the days of *Elias*, and the Pestilence in the Reign of *David* for his Crime in numbering the People ; I would first observe in general, that if these things had been barely recorded in Scripture, without assigning any reason for them at all, it is to be supposed he would not have found fault, or thought it an Objection either against Scripture or against Providence, since many things of this kind occur in the History of all Ages and Nations. And do these things become unjust, when sent for a valuable End, when they would not have been unjust, if sent for no visible Cause at all ?

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The Reasons and Causes of two of the three Instances mention'd by the Author are obvious and easily vindicated, *viz.* the Famine for *Saul's* Crime, and that in the days of *Elias*. As to the former, it was sent to avenge a signal Act of Perjury and Breach of Covenant, and to be a Monument to all succeeding Ages of God's just Displeasure against it, which must be own'd to be a very valuable and important End. But he thinks it hard that the People should suffer for the Faults of their Prince. And is any thing more usual in the History of all Ages, than for Nations to suffer for the Follies and Vices of their Kings? according to that old Observation, *Quicquid delirant Reges, plebuntur Achivi*. If the King, or the governing Power in any Community, breaks the Faith of Treaties, and commits an Act of Cruelty or Injustice against another King or Nation, no-body counts it unjust for the injur'd King or Nation to avenge the Indignity by a War, in which case thousands of the People must suffer that were no way necessary to the Fault, any farther than as they are the Members of such a Community, and the Subjects of such an unjust and perfidious Prince. And if this had been the Case with *Saul*, our Author would not have found fault. How unreasonable then is it to represent God as breaking through the Rules of Justice, for punishing the Injustice and Cruelty of *Saul*, and which was indeed a Breach of a national Covenant, by a Calamity that affected the whole Community! especially as it is highly probable the People themselves were not altogether innocent of it. We are told, that *Saul slew the Gibeonites in his Zeal to the Children of Israel and Judah*, 2 Sam. 21. 2. And they probably encouraged instead of hindering it; at least did not lay *Saul's* Injustice to heart, because the *Gibeonites* were originally Foreigners and a despised People. But God, the righteous Governor

vernor of the World, took the Vengeance into his own hands, to whose glorious Majesty there had been a solemn Appeal, in that National Covenant which was then broken.

Nor is it hard to account for the Famine in the days of *Elias*. The People of *Israel* were fallen into an universal Corruption, and into the most inexcusable Idolatry. The Prophets and Worshipers of the true God were persecuted and destroy'd, so that *Elijah* thought there was none remaining but himself. And though in this he was mistaken, yet the true Worshipers of God were so rare, and obliged to keep so private, as only to be discern'd by God himself. If therefore such a publick Calamity could ever be justified, it might on that occasion, especially as it was what was actually denounced against them in the Law of *Moses* in case of a general Defection, and Idolatry, *Levit.* 26. 19, 20. *Deut.* 28. 23, 24. and so was inflicted on them, in consequence of their Breach of the original Covenant. And if this Famine was sent and removed at *Elijah's* Request, (which this Writer seems to think very strange) I can see nothing in this but what was very proper, both as it tended to convince the *Israelites*, that this Famine was sent in a way of extraordinary Judgment for their Crimes, which otherwise they might perhaps have regarded as a thing of course, sent without any extraordinary Cause at all; and as it tended to procure a greater Regard and Veneration for *Elijah*, and for the Message he delivered in the Name of God; who had raised him up with this very View, that he might call a degenerate People to Repentance, and recover them to the Service and Acknowledgment of the true God. I think therefore it was very wisely order'd, that he should be made use of as the Instrument for denouncing the Judgment which God had determin'd to inflict, that

that it should be brought on at his Request, and should be removed at his Prayer.

But perhaps it may seem harder to vindicate the Pestilence inflicted on *Israel* for *David's* Crime in numbering the People. Our Author can see no Sin that *David* was guilty of at all, or if he was, the People were innocent. As to the first, since *Joab* himself, though none of the most religious, was sensible of the Sin, and endeavoured to divert the King from it; see 2 *Sam.* 24. 3, 4. 1 *Chron.* 21. 6. and since *David's* own Heart smote him after he had done it, even before the Prophet came to him, and he said, *I have sinned greatly in that I have done*, ver. 10. (and surely they must be allow'd to have been better Judges of it than our Author at this distance) we may be sure it was a Crime, and a great one, though the particular Circumstances of it are unknown to us. But he urges, that *David* himself calls the People *innocent Sheep*, and asks, *What had they done?* ver. 17. but all that can be concluded from this is, that as became a true Penitent, out of the deep Sense he had of his own Guilt, and the tender Affection he bore to the People, (whose Crimes he did not know as well as his own) he desired that the Calamity might rather fall on himself and on his own Family, than on them; which shew'd a noble Publick-spiritedness, and a Love to his Country, that deserves to be admir'd, if this Gentleman could admire any thing in a Jewish Hero. Indeed if any People or Nation could be found perfectly innocent in the sight of God, we might reasonably conclude, that God would not send such publick Miseries upon them merely for the Crime of their King when they had none of their own. But this is not the present Case. We are told in the beginning of this Story, that *the Anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel*, that is, that God was justly displeased with the
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People for their Crimes and Wickedness, (for we never read in Scripture of God's being angry with any People but for their Sins) and therefore having decreed to punish them with a severe publick Calamity, he permitted *Satan* to tempt *David*, and left him to himself, to his own Pride and Presumption, and then took this occasion to punish both the King's Presumption and the People's Sins. The People themselves deserved such a Chastisement for their own Sins, and then the inflicting it upon occasion of *David's* Crime, did not make it less just than it would have been if inflicted upon them without any Crime of his at all. And upon his and their Repentance (for the Elders of *Israel*, as well as the King, were clothed in Sackcloth, and humbled themselves before God, 1 *Chron.* 21. 17.) God's Wrath was averted, and the threaten'd Punishment not inflicted in its full Rigour. This the Author thinks fit to represent, as if God *chang'd his Mind, and that suddenly too*; and he may as well represent all Acts of Mercy shewn to Sinners upon their Repentance under that Idea.

But he finds another Difficulty in the Story; he can't think it was a mere Pestilence, when a real Angel is said to be miraculously sent to execute God's Anger, 1 *Chron.* 21. 15, 18. as if it might not be a true Pestilence, and yet an Angel sent to execute it. What Use God may make of Angels, good or evil, in inflicting Calamities on Nations or particular Persons, is a thing of which we cannot judge; but it may be done very often, for aught this Gentleman knows, or can prove to the contrary. His last Objection, concerning the different Accounts of the Numbers of the People, 2 *Sam.* 24. 1 *Chron.* 21. is not very material. For since there were standing Forces which were divided into twelve Bodies of 24000 each, one of which was to attend the Court every Month, 1 *Chron.* 27. 1. if

if we suppose that these are not reckon'd among the 800000 mention'd in the Book of *Samuel*, and that they are included in the 1100000 mention'd in the Book of *Chronicles*, it will bring the Computation so near, that the Difference will be very small; and there is no Inconvenience in supposing, that though the round Numbers are mention'd in the gross, yet there might be some more or less; Instances of which kind are usual both in Scripture and other Writings.

But as to his Pretence, that *if in the beginning of Saul's Reign the Numbers were rightly calculated, it is morally impossible that either Account should be true*; there is no Foundation for it; since the Passage he refers to, *1 Sam. 11. 8.* does not contain an Account of the whole number of the People of *Israel*, but only of those that came to help *Saul* against the *Ammonites*; and there came of the Tribe of *Judah* but 30000, which certainly was but a small part of that numerous Tribe. Besides, it may justly be supposed, that the Numbers of the People had considerably increased between that Expedition of *Saul* and *David's* numbering the People, which could scarce be less than fifty Years, and it may be more, especially since *David's* Reign had been a time of great Prosperity, in which, though there had been many Wars, they were very successful.

But, 2dly, let us consider the Instances produced by the Author, relating to those Judgments in which God made use of Men as the Executioners of his Vengeance. Such was the Destruction of the *Canaanites* by the *Israelites*, and of the *Amalekites* by *Saul*.

As to the former of these, the Author represents it as an unparallel'd piece of Injustice and Cruelty. Nor is there any thing in his whole Book that he labours more than this; see p. 272,
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273, 274 *. see also p. 97, 264 †. But to make good his Charge, he must either prove that God could not justly exterminate the *Canaanites* for their Wickedness; or if he did, that he could not justly commissionate the *Israelites* to be the Executioners of his Vengeance; or if he could give such a Commission, they could not justly execute it.

As to the first, 'tis evident from Scripture that the *Canaanites* were guilty not only of the grossest Idolatries, sacrificing their own Children to *Moloch*, but of the most execrable Vices and Impurities not fit to be named, and which in all civiliz'd Countries deserved Death; such as not only Adultery, but all manner of Incest, even with their own Fathers and Mothers, Sodomy, Bestiality, &c. For after the *Israelites* are warn'd against these and other abominable Crimes, *Lev. 18.* it is added, ver. 24, 25. *Defile not your selves in any of these things, for in all these things the Nations were defiled which I cast out before you; and the Land is defiled, therefore do I visit the Iniquity thereof upon it; and the Land itself vomiteth out her Inhabitants.* See also *Lev. 20. 23.* where God declares, that because of these things, *he abhorred those Nations, and cast them out.* 'Tis plain then, that the Wickedness of the *Canaanites* was the true Cause of the Punishment inflicted on them. And accordingly it is given as a Reason why they were not expelled and destroy'd a considerable time before, that the *Iniquities of the Amorites were not yet full*, *Gen. 15. 16.* So that it was not till the Measure of their Sins was compleated, and their Wickedness got to the height, and become incorrigible and universal, that the Judgment was inflicted. Now I think it cannot be denied, that God who is the sovereign Arbiter of Life, and who may when-

* P. 245, 246, &c.

† P. 83, 238.

whenever he pleases take away Men's Lives without Injustice, may in just Judgment cut short the Lives of Persons for their Crimes, and not only of particular Persons but of Nations, yea so as to bring a general Destruction upon them. And it may be highly for the Good of the World in general, that he should sometimes exhibit such signal Instances of his Vengeance on guilty Nations, when their Wickedness is universal, and arrived to the Height. If therefore God had destroy'd the *Canaanites* by Famine or by Pestilence, if he had caused Fire from Heaven to consume them, or had caused the Earth to open and swallow them up, (as has sometimes happen'd to whole Cities) who would have pretended to arraign his wise and just Providence; though in these and all publick Calamities of such a nature, Infants must have suffer'd as well as the Parents, and among the Adult some particular Persons that were innocent must have been involved in the common Ruin?

But perhaps though God might justly have sent such Judgments as should have depopulated the Country, and have destroy'd such an impious and abandon'd Race of Men from the Face of the Earth, yet he could not justly commisionate the *Israelites* to execute this Vengeance upon them. This is the Author's Sentiment. He argues, that *God has a thousand ways of punishing wicked Nations, without commanding Men to do any thing which by the Law of Nature he has forbid them.* And he has many Words to shew, that God cannot give any Command inconsistent with the Law of Nature, p. 272, 273 *. He here supposes, that whatever other Methods God might make use of for punishing or destroying guilty Nations, yet to employ Men to do it is contrary to the Law of Nature, and to the Duties Men owe to one another.

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* P. 245, 246.

This must depend upon this Principle, that in no Case whatsoever can it be lawful or proper for those of the same Species to hurt or destroy one another, nor can any Authority whatsoever empower them to do so; a Principle both contrary to the common Sense of all Mankind, and inconsistent with the Author's own Assertions. He himself declares, p. 345 *. where he lays down his Rule of judging of Actions by their Tendency, that "the killing a Man, [and the same may be said of killing many Men] "consider'd without its Circumstances, is an Action neither good "nor bad; but by the Magistrate, when the publick Good requires it, is always good." It cannot be denied that the Magistrate may lawfully commissionate another Man or Men to execute his Sentence, by killing the Criminal or Criminals, though of the same Species. A King may appoint some of his Subjects to punish or destroy others of them when the publick Good requires it. Our Author talks of *the Right Nations have of resenting national Injuries*, p. 341 †. he will not deny that Kings and States may commissionate Generals, and Armies to kill and take captive, in a just War, though this will necessarily involve the Ruin of thousands, who were no other way guilty than by being the Subjects of this or that State. Supposing therefore, that God the supreme Lord and righteous Governor of the World, sees it proper to inflict severe Punishments on a guilty People for their abominable Crimes, and even to extirpate that impious Race with a general Destruction, that so his Judgments may be more conspicuous; I cannot see upon what Foundation it can be pretended, that he cannot, when it seems best to answer the Designs of his Wisdom, of which he is certainly the properest Judge, commissionate and

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* P. 312.

† P. 309.

appoint another Nation to execute that Sentence, or that his Authority in that Case would not be a sufficient Warrant.

And that the *Israelites* had this Warrant to extirpate the *Canaanites* for their Wickedness is evident, supposing the Facts recorded in Scripture to be true; and this must be supposed in order to judge of the present Question, which is, Whether the Action, as there related, with all its Circumstances, be justifiable? The same Authority commission'd them to do this, that had brought them out of *Egypt*, and led them through the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness, by a Succession of the most glorious and unparallel'd Miracles, which it was not possible to regard as proceeding from any other than the Lord of Nature; (concerning which see above, p. 63.) the same Authority by which they had received the Law at *Sinai* with such amazing Circumstances of divine Glory and Grandeur; so that it was impossible for the *Israelites* to doubt of their having a divine Commission and Warrant: Especially if we add to this, that they were assisted in executing the Sentence by the most extraordinary Exertions of a divine Power. Of this kind were their miraculous passing *Jordan*, and the falling down of the Walls of *Jericho* before them. And if the Day was miraculously prolong'd, which is all that is to be understood by the Sun's standing still, which our Author seems willing to ridicule, p. 275 *. I suppose it will be granted, that this was not above the divine Power. And if God saw fit to chuse this Method, to convince all the World that it was his Hand, I don't see what Fault this Writer can find with it, since he requires, that " if God design'd what he did to be a Terror to
" others, he should act after such a signal and supernatural manner, as all should see it was his
" own doing, p. 273.†.

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* P. 248. † P. 246.

He thinks indeed the *Israelites* were very unfit to execute that Vengeance, because they *were as prone to Idolatry as the Canaanites themselves*. But besides, that it was not for their Idolatry alone, but for their other horrid and abominable Vices, and unnatural Impurities, that the *Canaanites* were punish'd; and the *Israelites* with all their Faults were far from being so wicked as they, or so universally idolatrous; besides this, I say, the Prone-ness of the *Israelites* to Idolatry made it the more proper to deter them from it, by so severe an Execution, and by making them the Instruments of it. And since God had for wise Reasons determin'd to erect them into a peculiar Polity, for maintaining his true Worship and Religion in the World, nothing could be more apt to create in them an Abhorrence of those gross Idolatries and other execrable Vices and Impurities, than that on the account of these things, they were expressly commanded to exterminate that wicked People; and at the same time were told, that they also should be destroy'd and expell'd out of the Land, if they fell into the like Abominations.

It is nothing to the purpose to say, as this Author does, that the *Canaanites* had done the *Israelites* no Injury, and *had not given them the least Cause of Complaint*. Though they had not, yet if they deserved to be destroy'd on other Accounts, for their abominable Crimes and Wickedness, and if God saw fit to commission the *Israelites* to execute his just Sentence (and of this as things were circumstanced they could not doubt) in this case it was no Cruelty or Injustice in them to execute it. A Man may, in obedience to the Orders of a just Magistrate, put Persons to death, against whom he himself had no particular Cause of Complaint; in which case it would be wrong to charge him with *Injustice* or *Cruelty*, or with *murdering those that*
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did him no Injury, as the Author expresses it. A thing may indeed (as he observes, p. 274*) be done by *the determinate Counsel and Foreknowledge of God*, and yet this may not justify or excuse those that did it; as in the Case of the *Jews* crucifying Christ, *Act.* 4. 27, 28. But it cannot be pretended that in this Case there was any express Command or Commission from God, or that the *Jews* did it in Obedience to such a Command; and God's foreseeing it, and over-ruling their Malice to the Purposes of his own infinite Wisdom, did not at all lessen their Crime. But where there is an express and formal Command or Commission from God, as was the Case of the *Israelites* with regard to their destroying the *Canaanites*, they were obliged to execute it; and to have refused to do so, would have been as much a Fault, as if a Person should, through a partial Fondness, forbear to execute the Sentence of a just Magistrate.

But this Writer thinks, if the *Israelites* had a divine Commission to extirpate the *Canaanites*, the *Canaanites* ought to have known it. They did know it; they had heard of all the Miracles wrought for the *Israelites* in *Egypt*, at the Red Sea, and in the Wilderness, and of their miraculous passing *Jordan*, and that God had commanded them to destroy the *Canaanites*, *Josh.* 2. 9, 10, 11. 5. 1. 9. 9, 10, 24. This ought tho' not to have made them offer up their Throats, as this Author expresses it, yet to have been a sufficient Warning to them to have fled the Country, (as many of them did;) or to have brought them to a sincere Repentance for their Idolatries and unnatural Crimes, and to an Acknowledgement of the only true God; in which case it is very probable God would have still spared them: but they continued incorrigible, and God in righteous Judgment gave them up to their

* P. 247.

own hardned Obstinacy (which is all that is signified by his *hardening their Hearts*, Josh. 11. 20.) as a just Punishment for their Crimes, so that they persisted in the War to their own Destruction. The Author it is like thinks it a very smart Observation, that there *were two opposite Rights at the same time, a Right in the Jews by Revelation to take away the Lives of the Canaanites, and a Right in the Canaanites by the Law of Nature to defend their Lives.* But might it not as well be said, that to suppose any Nation to have a Right to invade another in a just War, (which this Gentleman will not deny) is to suppose two opposite Rights at the same time, and both too by the Law of Nature and Nations, a Right in the one to invade, a Right in the other to defend?

As to his Apprehensions that other Nations might think *this a good Precedent for invading a neighbouring idolatrous Nation, and utterly destroying them in order to get Possession of their Country;* I shall only say, that if no Nation undertakes to exterminate another, and possess their Country without as evident Proofs of a divine Commission, as the *Israelites* had, we need not be afraid of any ill Consequences that may be drawn from this Example; and if they undertake it without such a Commission, I don't think the Scriptures are answerable for this. This Gentleman indeed questions, *Whether the Spaniards would have murder'd so many Millions in the Indies, had they not thought they might have used them like Canaanites?* p. 264 *. And for my part I make no question at all, but if there had been no such thing ever done, as the Extirpation of the *Canaanites* by the *Israelites*, the *Spaniards* would have done what they did, which was evidently owing to their own Ambition, Avarice, and Cruelty.

A

A great deal of what has been offer'd with regard to the *Canaanites*, may be applied to the Case of the *Amalekites* whom *Saul* was order'd to destroy; with this Difference, that it cannot be pretended in this Case as it was in the former, that the *Amalekites* had done the *Israelites* no Injury. They attack'd them without any Provocation, when they were naked and unarm'd, just deliver'd from their cruel Oppressors; and that in a treacherous and barbarous manner, cutting off the Weak, the Weary, and the Aged; and what aggravated their Crime, they attack'd them immediately after God had brought them out of *Egypt* and the Red Sea by a Train of astonishing Miracles, which shew'd a manifest Contempt of God, and a Defiance of his Power and Justice, *Exod.* 17. 8. *Deut.* 25. 17, 18, 19. And it therefore seem'd fit to him, for this added to their other Crimes, to pronounce a solemn Sentence of Extirpation against them.

But this Writer thinks it strange, *that Saul should be commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites for an Injury done 400 Years before*, p. 263*. But this only proves, that God bore long with that wicked People, and in his great Mercy did not immediately execute the threaten'd Punishment. It would not indeed be a justifiable Conduct in Men without a divine Warrant, to pretend to punish any People for Injuries done by their Ancestors some Ages ago. But the righteous Judge of all the World may take his own Time of punishing guilty Nations. He who takes in the whole Compass of Times and Events at one all-comprehending View, must be allow'd to know what is the properest Season for executing his Judgments. As it is only in this World that Nations and Communities as such can be punish'd, so God can order it so that such Punishments shall be deferred till the

* P. 237.

national Iniquities be arrived at the Height ; and then when he executes his Judgments at last, he may punish them for all together ; in which Case, though the Sins of that Generation are still supposed to be such as fully justify the divine Vengeance, yet a Regard is also had to those of their Ancestors. This was the Sentiment of the wisest among the Heathens ; see particularly *Plutarch, de sera numinis vindicta*. And particularly in the present Case, with regard to the *Amalekites*, we may justly conclude that it was not till *their Iniquities were full*, as it is said of the *Canaanites*, and till their great Wickedness of all kinds had render'd them ripe for Vengeance *, (besides that they had been all along from the time of their first Offence very injurious to the *Israelites*, *Judg.* 3. 13. 6. 3, 33. 7. 12. 10. 12.) that God commanded that Sentence of Extirpation that had been pronounced against them so long before, to be actually executed. His deferring it so long, shew'd his Indulgence and Forbearance ; his causing it to be executed at last, shews that his Justice, though it may seem to be slow, is sure ; and his ordering a total Extirpation of them and theirs, render'd the Punishment more conspicuous. And it has been already shewn, that it does not render the Punishment of a guilty Nation unjust, that some particular Persons in a Community, that had strictly no hand in the publick Crimes, any farther than as they belong'd to such a Community, yet are involved in the common Calamity. In the present Case, if the *Israelites* had been allow'd to take Captives, or to take the Cattle and Substance of the *Amalekites* to themselves, it would have look'd

as

* Accordingly we find, that in the Command given to *Saul* to destroy the *Amalekites*, they are expressly call'd, *the Sinners the Amalekites*, to signify that they were a very wicked People. See 1 *Sam.* 15. 18.

as if the War had been undertaken merely from a Desire of Spoil ; but when they were commanded utterly to destroy all that belong'd to them, and to reserve nothing for themselves, it more plainly appear'd that in this they acted merely as Executioners of the divine Sentence.

Now if it was just in God, the righteous Governor of the World, to pronounce such a Sentence on a People for their Crimes, and if he commanded *Saul* to execute it, he was certainly obliged to do so, and could not refuse without the Guilt of Rebellion against God. And what heighten'd his Guilt was, that he himself had undertaken to execute it, and did it partially, sparing out of an avaritious Principle the best of the Spoils ; which was as if an inferior Officer for a Bribe or some such sinister Consideration, should neglect to execute the righteous Sentence of a wise and just Prince or Magistrate. He was therefore justly rejected from being King, for this added to his other Faults. And if (as this Writer observes) *God order'd Samuel, lest Saul should suspect the Design, to pretend a Sacrifice, when he sent him to anoint David ;* 'tis plain from the very Passage he refers to, *1 Sam.* 16. 2, 5. that the Pretence was true. For *Samuel* did actually sacrifice to the Lord ; and if he told *Saul* he went to sacrifice, he told him nothing but the Truth, though he did not tell him the whole Design. And surely this Gentleman, who elsewhere makes such large Allowances to Falshood and Deceit, is not on a sudden grown so scrupulous, as not to allow Persons prudently to conceal some Truths, when it is not proper to divulge them.

I shall conclude this Chapter with one general Observation, which may be applied to the several Instances he mentions ; and that is, that he seems all along to argue upon the Supposition, that God
has

has no farther Right over the Lives and Properties of his Creatures, than one Man has over another ; that therefore a divine Commission can never alter the Case, for whatever would be unjust for one Man to do to another without a divine Commission, can never be warranted by any divine Command or Authority ; and that, on the otherhand, whatever any Persons may do, when authorized by a special Command from God, another Man may do without any such Command.

Now these Principles which lie at the Foundation of all he advances against the Morality of the Scriptures, in the Instances produced by him, are manifestly false. When he so often repeats it, that *there is a Law of Nature, with the observing of which God cannot dispense either in himself or his Creatures*, if he intends to signify (as seems to be his Meaning) that God and Man are precisely under the same Law in all respects, and bound by the same Obligations, it is false and absurd. Many things are just in God towards Men, because he has a Right to do them, which would not be just in Men (at least without an extraordinary Commission from him) who have not that Right. For God's Propriety in us and Dominion over us is of a peculiar and transcendent Nature, infinitely superior to what any Man can have over his Fellow-Creatures. And it would be wrong to argue in such a Case as this Writer does, p. 265 *. *if God could act thus, it would be no Crime in Men to imitate him*. It does not follow, that because God, who is Lord of Life, can put an end to our Lives, and summon us hence when it seems fit to him to do so, that therefore one Man may send another out of the World, or any Man may put an end to his own Life, when he thinks convenient ; or that because God has a Right to give Riches, or take them

* P. 239.

them away, or to send Afflictions upon Persons for the Trial and Exercise of their Virtues, that therefore one Man may do so to another. And it would be absurd in such a Case to say, that God acts contrary to the eternal Rules of Justice, because he does to Men what one Man cannot justly do to another. He always indeed does that which is fit and right for him to do. But in judging of this he does not proceed merely by our scanty Rules, but by a superior Law of a much larger Extent and higher Consideration than that by which we act, and of which, in many cases, we, by the narrowness of our Views, are incompetent Judges; and that is, what appears to his own infinite Understanding to be (all things consider'd) most worthy of him as the great Governor of the World, and to be most for the Good of the whole.

Among Men it is evident, that that may be just in one Man because he has a Right to do it, which would not be just in another who has not that Right. And it is also evident, that in many Cases a Man may lawfully do that when commission'd and authorized by the civil Magistrate or governing Power in any Community, which he could not justly do without such a Commission and Authority; and all the World would count it a very absurd way of talking, that because a Man might justly do it when commission'd by lawful Authority, therefore another Man that had no such Authority or Commission to plead might do the same. And yet this seems to be the Strain of the Author's Reasoning.

He represents it as own'd by all Divines, "that
" the commanding or approving any thing con-
" trary to the Law of Nature is a Demonstration
" of the Falshood of any Religion, since it sup-
" poses a Son may sacrifice his Father, or do any
" thing, though ever so repugnant to the Light
" of

“ of Nature, p. 274 *.” But we must here distinguish between general Laws and extraordinary Cases; and between things that have an eternal and inseparable Malignity, and which no Circumstances can ever render lawful, as to hate God, to blaspheme him, to deny him, to give his peculiar Worship to Idols, &c. and things which though in general they are unlawful, yet in some particular Cases and Circumstances may cease to be so.

To suppose any Revelation to require any thing which hath an eternal and inseparable Malignity in it, would be a manifest Proof of its Falseness, and that it could not come from God; and so it would, if it gave any general Laws which are manifestly contrary to Truth, to Justice, and Equity: but there may be particular extraordinary Cases excepted from those general Rules, and which, taking in all the Circumstances, are justifiable. Thus, *e. g.* to make a general Law obliging or allowing any Man that thinks fit to destroy another that has done him no Injury, or to deprive him of his Life and Property, would be unjust, and what God could not give; and yet particular Cases may happen, in which a Man may lawfully destroy another that has done him no particular Injury, and deprive him of his Life and Property, *viz.* if he does it as an Executioner of the just Sentence of a wise Magistrate. To suppose a general Law that a Man may betray his Friend and Benefactor, or that a Son may put his Father to death, or a Father his Son when he thinks convenient, would be contrary to Reason and Nature; and yet Cases may happen in which a Man may be obliged to give up his dearest Friend, yea, and a Father a Son, or a Son a Father to death, (though this be produced by the Author as an Instance in which God himself cannot dispense) where

* P. 247.

where the publick Good of the Commonwealth requires it.

In these and many other Instances that might be mentioned, we must distinguish between general Rules and extraordinary Cases. And it is very odd in this Writer to represent every extraordinary Action, which is an Exception from the common Rules, as a Breach of the Law of Nature; when he himself expressly tells us, that there are no general Rules without many Exceptions, and that Actions are to be judged wholly by the Circumstances Persons are in, and that things are lawful in one Circumstance which are not so in another.

He observes from Bishop *Burnet*, that it was the Opinion of *Cromwel*, and some others in those times, "That the Moral Laws were only binding in ordinary Cases; but that upon extraordinary ones those might be superseded; he and that Set of Men justifying their ill Actions, from the Practice of *Ehud* and *Jael*, *Sampson* and *David*." This our Author attributes to their making things not of a moral Nature, necessary Ingredients of Religion, p. 154*. But supposing Persons were left, as this Gentleman would have them, to collect their Duty from the Reason and Nature of Things; I would fain know what Security there would be, that they would not form the same Conclusion, which he seems here to condemn. The Rule he himself proposes, as that by which they are to conduct themselves, is, that *they act as the Circumstances they are in do require*; see p. 19. and elsewhere. May they not therefore conclude, that in extraordinary Circumstances extraordinary Things may be done? There would be much more danger of Men's being led astray, if they were left thus at large without any other Rule to direct them, than if they govern'd themselves by the Rules of

Scrip-

Scripture, which are sufficiently plain and distinct. And the extraordinary Cases there mention'd cannot mislead us, if consider'd with all the Circumstances as there related, because they cannot be a Precedent except in Cases alike circumstanced, and where there is a like Warrant or Authority. As to the particular Instance that Bishop *Burnet* refers to, when he makes the Remark above-mention'd, *viz.* *Cromwel's* solemnly denying a Thing which he was really guilty of, I don't see but it might be strictly justified by our Author's Maxims concerning Truth and Lying, [as to which see Part I. p. 200, & *seq.*] though it could not possibly be justified by Scripture. Upon the whole, it is wrong to draw up a Charge against the Scripture-Morality from some extraordinary Cases, when the Laws and Precepts there given, and by which we are to be govern'd, are unquestionably pure and excellent.



C H A P. XIII.

The Author's Attempt to shew that there is a Contrast between the Spirit of the Old and the New Testament, consider'd.

OUR Author supposes that there is a *Contrast* (as he expresses it, p. 269 *.) *between the Spirit of the Old and the Spirit of the New Testament.* To this end he tells us, "that the holier Men in
" the Old Testament are represented, the more
" cruel they seem to be, as well as more addicted
" to cursing;" of which he gives some Instances. And he observes, that "there is so great a Difference between the Representations made of
" God

* P. 242,

“ God in the Books of the Jewish and Christian
 “ Religion, that it gave occasion to the Sect of
 “ the *Manichees*, who supposed two Gods, the
 “ one evil, fierce, and cruel, whom they called
 “ *the God of the Old Testament*; the other good,
 “ kind, and merciful, whom they called *the God*
 “ *of the New Testament*, p. 264, 267*.”

One would think, by our Author's Representation, that the Old Testament, particularly the Law of *Moses*, every-where breathes a Spirit of Fierceness and Cruelty; when on the contrary, it will appear to any one that impartially considers the Precepts of that Law, that they breathe the utmost Humanity. Not only are all Methods of Extortion, Oppression, and Cruelty discountenanced and forbidden in the strongest manner, but all the Instances of mutual Benevolence, Charity, and Good-will, are effectually recommended and enforced; there is the most compassionate Care manifested for the Case of the Poor, the Indigent, and Distressed, for Servants, &c. such as scarce can be parallel'd in any other Laws. Any one will be convinced of this, that will impartially examine the Passages referred to in the Bottom of the Page †.

If it be said, that though Charity and Benevolence be strongly recommended there, yet the *Israelites* were to confine it to those of their own Nation; I answer, first, that as the Law of *Moses* was never designed as an universal Law to all Mankind, but peculiarly calculated to the Jewish Nation; so it is not to be wonder'd at, if it is chiefly intended to regulate their Conduct towards one another. The Laws of every Country are in the first place design'd for those of that Country or Nation,

* P. 241.

† *Exod.* 22. 22, 23, 24, 26, 27. *Lev.* 19. 9, 10. 23. 22. *Deut.* 14. 29. 16. 11, 14. 24. 10, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21. 26. 12, 13.

Nation, and only by the bye mention their Conduct towards others; if therefore those Laws prescribe a humane, benign, social Conduct towards one another, if they tend to promote mutual Benevolence, Mildness, Honesty, Equity in their Behaviour; this is sufficient to vindicate the Wisdom and Equity of those Laws.

- But besides this, there are many Precepts in the Law of *Moses* that prescribe a kind, a humane, and benign Disposition and Conduct, not only towards those of their own Nation, but towards the Strangers that sojourned among them. They were commanded not to vex nor oppress them, *Exod.* 22. 21. 23. 9. and a solemn Curse is pronounced upon those that did so, *Deut.* 27. 19. Not only were they not to oppress them, but they were to use them with the greatest Humanity and Tenderneſs, to assist and to relieve them, *Lev.* 25. 35. They are commanded to love the Strangers, and that because *God loveth them*, and because *they themselves were Strangers in the Land of Egypt*, *Deut.* 10. 18, 19. The Reason last mention'd, and which is frequently repeated, shews that by Strangers we are to understand Foreigners, those of other Nations, not incorporated into their Polity; they were to be kind to them as Strangers, and consider'd under that Notion. And particularly they were to be kind to the *Egyptians*, because they had been Strangers in their Land, *Deut.* 23. 7. They were to remember their Kindness in entertaining them at first, though afterwards they used them so cruelly.

In the Law of *Moses*, as well as in the Gospel, they are commanded *to love their Neighbours as themselves*, *Lev.* 19. 18. And by Neighbours are to be understood even the *Strangers* that were *Sojourners among them*, as is evident from the 33d and 34th Verses of that Chapter. All Revenge and
inward

inward Hatred and Grudging is forbidden, *Lev.* 19. 17, 18. yea, they are commanded to do good to their Enemies themselves, and to be ready to assist them in kind Offices, *Exod.* 23. 4, 5. Agreeable to which is that Passage, *Prov.* 25. 21, 22. cited by the Apostle *Paul*, *If thine Enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him Drink, &c.*

I might produce many other Instances of that Spirit of Humanity, Kindness and Benevolence that appears in the Law of *Moses*, and even in the ritual Precepts themselves. One End of that Precept of observing the Sabbath-day, was not only that they might have leisure from their worldly Business, to apply themselves to the Worship of God, but that their Beasts, their Servants, and the Stranger might be refresh'd, *Exod.* 23. 12. *Deut.* 5. 14. As to their Conduct towards the Nations of *Canaan*, this was an extraordinary Case; they did it not by virtue of any general Law that prescrib'd the same Conduct towards all other Nations, but acted in this by a particular Command, as Executioners of the divine Sentence against those particular Nations, whom God had justly devoted to Destruction for their abominable Wickedness.

Our Author cites a Passage from Lord *Shaftsbury*, that "the Ζεύς ξένιος the *Jupiter* of Strangers" was among the Ancients one of the solemn Characters of Divinity, benign to Mankind, &c." And is not this the Notion under which he is represented in the Old Testament? It is given as the amiable Character of God, *Deut.* 10. 18. that he *doth execute the Judgment of the Fatherless and Widow, and loveth the Stranger in giving him Food and Raiment.*—*The Poor committeth himself unto thee, thou art the Helper of the Fatherless*, *Psal.* 10. 14. *A Father of the Fatherless, and a Judge of the Widows is God in his holy Habitation*, *Psal.* 68. 5. *The Lord preserveth the Strangers, he re-*

lieveth the Fatherless and Widow, Psal. 146. 9. See also Psal. 35. 10. 102. 17. 140. 12. If. 25. 4. Hos. 14. 3. God's universal Goodness to all Mankind is frequently celebrated in the Old Testament; that the Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works; that the Earth is full of his Goodness; and all Nations are often call'd upon to blefs him.

There is no reason therefore to pretend that the Representations made of the Deity in the Old and New Testament are different and inconsistent. He is represented under the same glorious Character in both, as a God of infinite Mercy and Compassion towards penitent returning Sinners, and at the same time as a God of infinite Justice and Purity, who hates Sin with a perfect Hatred. If any one should pretend, that all the Representations of the Deity under the Old Testament are terrible, without any Discoveries of his Mercy and Goodness; or that he is represented as all-merciful under the New, without any awful Displays of his Justice and Purity, this is evidently false. It is impossible to represent the Mercy and Goodness of God, his Readiness to forgive, his Patience and Long-suffering towards Sinners, in a stronger and more affecting manner than it is in the Old Testament, and that not merely in a single Passage, or in a few Passages, but in a vast number of Places, both in the Law, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms. None can be ignorant of this, that are not utter Strangers to the Scriptures. And on the other hand, there cannot be stronger Declarations of God's Justice and Hatred against Sin, or more lively Descriptions of the Vengeance he will inflict upon impenitent obstinate Sinners, than are made in the New Testament. The Justice and Mercy of God are all along represented both in the Old Testament and in the New in a bright Conjunction, so

as to form the most perfect Character and Idea of the Deity, equally amiable and venerable. There is only this Difference, that in the Old Testament temporal Judgments are more frequently denounced, and in the New the Vengeance of God, and the Punishment of Sinners in a future State, is principally insisted upon.

To support the Charge of a Spirit of Cruelty which this Author advances against the Old Testament, he does not produce any Precepts of the Law injoining a cruel and inhuman Conduct; which would have been the proper way, if he had been able to do it; but he contents himself with producing some Instances of Cruelty under that Dispensation. Thus he mentions *David's* Treatment of the *Ammonites* *. But if this was too cruel (as I think it was) notwithstanding the vile Indignity they

* The Author, who takes a pleasure in exposing the Faults of the great Men recorded in Scripture, at the same time that he speaks with Rapture of the ancient Pagan Heroes, sets himself particularly to expose and censure *David*, p. 244. [p. 219, 220. 8°.] He blames him for telling a Falshood to *Abimelech* when his Life was in the utmost danger, though he himself allows Persons to tell Falshoods on much less urgent occasions; and what is still more unfair, he seems willing to should have the blame of the Murder of the Priests that followed upon it, which was intirely owing to the Cruelty and Jealousy of *Saul*, and the Calumnies of *Doeg*. He bitterly censures his passionate Resentments against *Nabal*, though nothing could be more churlish and injurious than *Nabal's* Treatment of him; see 1 *Sam.* 25. 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 21. But then he ought to have taken notice of the noble Temper he express'd in suffering himself to be so soon appeased, and of the excellent Reflections he makes on that occasion, ver. 32, 33, 39. He blames him for charging *Solomon* to punish *Shimei*, when he ought rather to have admir'd his Patience and Lenity, and his religious Regard to his Word, in not inflicting the Punishment upon him which he had justly deserved in his own Life-time. He mentions his Treatment of *Uriah*, but takes no notice of the signal Repentance he express'd. He charges him with great Treachery and Ingratitude to the *King of Gath*, his generous Protector, for invading the *Amalekites* when he pretended he made an Inroad into *Judea*. But it does not appear that the People *David* in-

they had offer'd to him, and though they had so manifestly violated the Law of Nations, this is no more to be charged upon the Spirit of the Old Testament than his Adultery or Murder of *Uriah*. It is very hard, that the wrong things that were done by those that lived under that Dispensation, even though they might otherwise be good Men, should be charged upon the Old Testament, as if their ill Actions were countenanced and authorized there.

The Curses and Imprecations in the 109th Psalm and in other places, which this Writer urges to prove that the Spirit of the Old Testament was a Spirit of Cruelty, may be justly regarded as prophetic Denunciations of God's Judgments, or as Predictions of the Evils that should befall the Wicked, and on this View the Author's Objection is entirely lost. And every one that is acquainted with the *Hebrew* knows that this is fully as agreeable to the Letter of the Text, which runs in the future Tense *. Besides no-body pretends, that it is

vaded were Allies of the *Philistines*, or in Friendship with them, though the Author supposes it without the least Proof; the contrary may rather be concluded from 1 Sam. 30. 16. And if *David* had been a *Greek* or a *Roman*, this Gentleman perhaps would have admir'd his Patriotism and Love to his Country, even when he was banish'd from it; that he did not suffer his Resentments against *Saul* to carry him so far as to turn his Arms against his Country; but took that Opportunity to invade its ancient Enemies, for such were the *Amalekites*, and whom he knew to be a People whom God himself had devoted to Destruction. And as to his deceiving *Achish*, by pretending to invade the *South* of *Judah*, (which was in some measure true, since he invaded the Nations that lay to the *South* of *Judah*, but which *Achish* understood of his invading *Judea* itself) this Author, upon his Principles, must think this either no Fault at all, or a very slight one. And I suppose he will easily forgive him, if he chose rather to prevaricate a little, than either to disoblige his Protector, or turn his Arms against his Country.

* See this Objection fully consider'd in Mr. *Lowth's* Vindication of the Inspiration of the Writings of the Old and New Testament, Chap. 5. p. 216, &c. 2d. Edit.

is in all Cases unlawful to apply to God for the Punishment of the obstinate incorrigible Enemies of his Name and Kingdom, that their Malice may be defeated, their Power destroy'd, and their Designs and Attempts turn'd to their own Confusion, which will be highly to the Glory of the divine Wisdom and governing Justice. Thus in the New Testament it is represented as the Voice of *the Souls under the Altar*, *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our Blood on them that dwell on the Earth!* And Heaven and Earth are represented as rejoicing in the Destruction of mystical *Babylon*, and giving Glory to God on that account, *Rev.* 18. 19.

The Instance this Writer produces out of the 137th *Psalms*, 8th and 9th Verses, relating to the Curses bestowed upon *Babylon*, is to be regarded as a prophetic Denunciation of the Wrath and Misery that should come upon the *Babylonians*; and that those whom God should make use of as the Executioners of his just Vengeance should prosper in their Undertaking. As to the Expression of taking their little ones, and dashing them against the Stones, it is only a proverbial way of speaking, to signify an utter Destruction or Desolation, in which Infants are commonly involved with their Parents. Compare *Is.* 13. 16. where it is foretold, that this should actually be the Case, at the Destruction of *Babylon*.

But to insinuate, as the Author does, that this Curse was denounced against *Babylon* for no other Reason, but because she desired of her Captives *one of the Songs of Zion*, is gross Misrepresentation. As if this was all the Injury that *Babylon* had done the *Jews*, when in this very Psalm, the *carrying them into Captivity* and the *laying them waste*, that is, overturning their Nation and Polity, is mention'd ver. 3. Nor is this at all inconsistent, as

this Gentleman insinuates, with the Command given to those that are Captives in *Babylon*, by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, to *pray for the Peace of Babylon, and that in the Peace thereof they should have Peace*, Jer. 29. 7. The evident Design of this Command is to check the Expectations they had, (and which the false Prophets cherish'd in them by their pretended Predictions) of a speedy Return from *Babylon* to *Jerusalem*; in opposition to which, *Jeremiah* writ to them to let them know, that they were yet to continue Captives a considerable time, viz. till the 70 Years appointed for it were expired. He advises them therefore, instead of giving way to such vain Hopes, to rest contented and think of settling themselves there quietly, as in the Place allotted them for their Abode. He advises them to build Houses and plant Gardens, &c. ver. 5, 6. as those that expected to stay there a great while, and in the mean time, till the appointed Season for their Deliverance came, to regard *Babylon* as their Country, and to live peaceably in it, and pray for its Prosperity in which their own should be involved. This is the evident Intention of that Passage; but the Design of it cannot possibly be, as if they were not to desire or pray that those Predictions which related to the Destruction of *Babylon*, and to their Return to their own Country, both which are still join'd together, see Jer. 25. 12. should be accomplish'd in the proper time: which is in effect, all that is intended in the 137th Psalm. And the same Prophet *Jeremiah* who gives them that Advice, does also, in the most solemn and express manner, foretel the Destruction of *Babylon*, and denounce God's Judgments against it, in the 51st and 52d Chapters of his Prophecies.

The Instances this Writer next produces to prove the Spirit of Cruelty under the Old Testament, relate to the Prophets *Elijah* and *Elisba*. *Israel* was

at that time in a State of the greatest Corruption and Degeneracy, universally revolted from the true God, *Baal* worshipped, and the Prophets of the true God murder'd. In this state of things God raised up two extraordinary Prophets, *Elijah* and *Elisba*, whom he sent to reclaim a degenerate Court and People, and awaken them to Repentance, and to restore the true Religion among them, which was almost intirely lost; and therefore they were enabled to do the most signal Miracles that we read of from the time of *Moses*, far greater than the other Prophets that prophesied in *Judab*; and it pleased God also to take extraordinary Methods to vindicate their Authority, and to procure a greater Awe and Veneration to their Persons and Character, and thereby to the Message they brought.

It was for this purpose, that in the Case of *Elisba* God order'd it so, that a She-bear devoured the Children, that, by way of Ridicule and Contempt of him and his prophetick Office, call'd him *Bald-head*, and bid him *go up*, or ascend, as his Master *Elijah* had done a little before. It pleased God to take this Method to vindicate the Authority of his Prophet, which was of considerable Importance at his first Entrance on his prophetical Office; and to punish the Town of *Bethel* to which the Children belonged, which had long been the Seat of publick Idolatry; especially as it is highly probable that the Parents and Magistrates countenanced them in it; for it seems to have been a publick thing in which great numbers of them were concern'd. *Elisba's* cursing them was not merely out of a Spirit of private Cruelty and Revenge, but by a prophetick Motion he denounced Judgments against them *in the Name of the Lord*, and by Authority from him. And what follow'd upon it had a Tendency to awaken the People to a

Sense of their own Guilt, and a Dread of the divine Justice due to them for their Crimes. It cannot be denied, that God who is the Lord of Life may take away the Lives of Children when he pleases, and daily does so in the Course of his most wise Providence. And if an account had been barely given of two She-bears coming, and devouring a number of Children that were playing together, without any Curse preceding, or assigning any Reason for it at all, I am persuaded this Writer would not have found fault; though in this Case the Hand of Providence must have been acknowledged in ordering or permitting it. And I cannot see why it is more unjust or cruel to order or permit two She-bears to act according to their Nature in devouring Children, when done for a valuable End, (as it was in this Case) than if it had been ordered or permitted without any visible Cause at all; or why it should be thought more cruel or unjust, if done in consequence of *Elisha's* prophetick Denunciation or Prediction, than if done without any previous Denunciation at all. The Calamity would have been the same to the Parents in the one Case as in the other, but not have answer'd so important an End.

The same Reasoning may be applied to that Instance the Author mentions, of *Elijah's* calling for Fire from Heaven to consume the two Captains and their Fifties. If in this he acted by a divine Direction, and extraordinary prophetick Impulse, (and any one that believes what is recorded of the rest of *Elijah's* Actions, must believe that he did so) I don't see what there is in this that can be pretended to argue either a cruel or vindictive Spirit in him, or Injustice in God, to take this Method to vindicate the Authority of his Prophet, and to punish the Presumption and Infidelity of an impious King; who had preferred *Baalzebub* the
God

God of *Ekron* to the only living and true God, and had sent to seize his Prophet for telling him the Truth. His sending a Company of Soldiers to take him, shew'd that he intended to seize him by Force of Arms and Violence, and bring him to Punishment. And on such an Occasion God thought fit to interpose in an extraordinary manner. But it may seem hard, that the Soldiers should suffer for the Crime of their King. And what more usual in all Ages, than for Soldiers to suffer for the Injustice or Ambition of their Prince? If these Soldiers had been sent on an Expedition into a neighbouring Country to seize some Persons there, and had all perish'd in the Attempt, no-body would have blam'd it, or thought it hard and unjust; and if God saw fit to punish them in an extraordinary manner, when they came in obedience to the King's Command, forcibly to seize one whom they knew to be an eminent Prophet of the living God, as if they could seize him in spite of Heaven, (for the third Captain, who express'd a deep Reverence for God and Dread of his Justice, was spared) I don't see that this can be charg'd as Cruelty or Injustice. It was indeed a useful Lesson to the People not to transgress the Law of God, out of a Desire to procure the Favour of the Court, which was the reigning Fault of that Time, when the People by the Example of their impious Princes fell generally into the Worship of *Baal*. Such amazing Judgments seem'd necessary to awaken both King and People to Repentance; they could not be more properly timed; and this Calamity inflicted on these few was an Advantage to the Nation in general, as it tended to reclaim them from their gross Idolatry and Wickedness; and it is probable it had a great Effect. We find *Jehoram* the succeeding King not so bad as his Predecessors. As to the Famine in the Days of *Ahab*,

Abab, this has been accounted for above, p. 347. as also that sent on *Israel* for *Saul's* Crime in slaying the *Gibeonites*, and the Pestilence on Occasion of *David's* numbering the People; all which this Writer is pleased to produce here as Instances of the Spirit of Cruelty that prevail'd under the Old Testament; as if there had never been Famine or Pestilence, or any publick Calamities sent on Nations but then; or as if it were a greater Reflection on the divine Goodness to send them for some remarkable Causes, than for no particular Cause known to us at all. There is one general Observation that may be applied to all those Instances the Author produces, and that is, that as the Law and Covenant of *Moses*, as such, was chiefly founded on temporal Promises and Threatnings; and as the most glorious temporal Blessings and Prosperity were promised in case of their Obedience, so the most dreadful temporal Judgments and Calamities were most expressly threaten'd to that People, if they revolted from the pure Worship and Service of God to open Wickedness and Idolatry; this was the very Tenor of that Covenant which the *Israelites* were brought under, and to which they had themselves consented. And this render'd such Judgments unexceptionably just and proper. Particularly they are threaten'd with the Famine and the Pestilence, *Deut.* 28. 15, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24. 32, 24. *Lev.* 26. 19, 25. and that God would send wild Beasts among them that should rob them of their Children, as well as destroy their Cattle, *Lev.* 26. 22. which was literally fulfilled in the Case of the Children devoured by the two She-Bears already mention'd. When therefore these Judgments were actually inflicted, they could not reasonably find fault. God had only fulfilled his Threatnings; and this ought to have made them reflect on their own Breaches of their Covenant,

and

and to have led them to Repentance, which wou'd have prevented those greater Calamities, and that utter Desolation and Captivity that afterwards befel them.

If our Saviour rebuk'd his Disciples, who were for gratifying their own Resentment against the *Samaritans* by calling for Fire from Heaven to consume them, under pretence of imitating the Example of *Elias*, this does not prove that *Elias* did wrong; but only that the Disciples had not the same Warrant that *Elias* had, nor acted upon the same Principles that he did. An Action may be very just in one Person that is not so in another, for want of the same Principles or Motives or the same Authority. Our Saviour plainly saw the vindictive Spirit they were acted by, tho' cover'd with the specious Appearance of Zeal, and therefore said, *Ye know not what manner of Spirit ye are of*, i. e. Ye pretend to be acted by the same Spirit with *Elias*, but ye are far from being so; and when he adds, *the Son of Man came not to destroy Men's Lives but to save them*; it is not to be understood as if it were now no longer lawful on any Occasion to inflict remarkable Judgments or Punishments. We find that afterwards *Peter* by a like divine Motion, and extraordinary Commission with *Elias*, denounc'd an immediate Death on *Ananias* and *Sapphira*; and *Elymas* the Sorcerer was struck blind by a divine Judgment pronounc'd upon him by the Apostle *Paul*.

In order to fix the Charge of a Spirit of Cruelty upon the Prophet *Elisha*, this Writer mentions the Curse pronounc'd upon *Gebazi* and his Seed, and that for a very inconsiderable Fault, as he is pleas'd to represent it; it was only for *accepting without his Master's knowledge a small Present from Naaman the Syrian*, p. 265 *. It is thus that he may

may lay the fault on the Prophet, that he excuses an Act of the highest Infidelity in his Servant. The Prophet had sworn in the most solemn manner to *Naaman*, who had urg'd him to take a Present, as *the Lord liveth before whom I stand*, or whose Prophet I am, *I will receive none*. And his Servant who heard and knew this, yet thought fit from a Principle of base Covetousness, to go after *Naaman* and take a Present from him in his Master's Name; and thus represent the Prophet of the Lord, as breaking what he had just before sworn with the greatest Solemnity, and this to a Foreigner who had just declar'd his good Intentions to forsake the Idolatry of his Country, and to turn to the Worship and Service of the only true God. I think one can hardly suppose a Crime in a Servant, all Things consider'd, more aggravated than this. The denouncing the Leprosy against him and his Seed *for ever* may be interpreted of its continuing for a considerable Time, since according to our Author's own Observation this Word often signifies a limited Time, and sometimes a short one; besides, there may be a tacit Limitation in case of Repentance, as it often is in such Threatnings.

But *the Prophet himself afterwards took forty Camels load of the good Things of Damascus, to tell their King the Truth in relation to his Recovery, and yet receiv'd him*. As to his deceiving him, this has been consider'd above, p. 310. for the Author is so fond of this Instance, that he has it twice. And if he receiv'd the Present the King sent him, which yet does not appear, I see no fault in it. He had not bound himself by Oath not to receive it, as in the former Case; and as it was in a time of Famine that he came to *Damascus*, and the Present consisted of Provisions, he might accept it as proper for him and those that were with him, tho' he refus'd

pus'd a Present of Money from *Naaman* when he was in his own Country, and under no such Necessity.

The Author produces it as a Proof of the Spirit of Cruelty that prevail'd under the Old Testament, that "God declares in the Decalogue, that he is
 " a jealous God, visiting the Iniquities of the Pa-
 " rents upon the Children to the third and fourth
 " Generation, p. 268 *. That Children may in many Cases suffer for their Parents Crimes, or be involv'd in those Evils and Calamities which properly and immediately were brought upon them by their Parents, is evident from the Consent of the wisest Nations; as when an Honour and Estate is forfeited by the Father's Rebellion. And such Things may be wisely order'd, the more effectually to deter Persons from committing Crimes by a Regard not only to their own Safety, but to the Welfare of their Offspring. That Passage of *Cicero* is remarkable to this purpose: *Nec verò me fugit quàm sit acerbum, Parentum scelera filiorum poenis lui; sed hoc præclare legibus comparatum est, ut charitas liberorum amiciores Parentes Reipublicæ redderet. Itaque Lepidus crudelis in liberos, non is qui Lepidum hostem judicat. Epist. 12. ad Brutum.*
 " I am not ignorant (says he) how hard it may
 " seem, that the Children shou'd suffer for the Pa-
 " rents Crimes; but this was wisely provided by
 " the Laws, that their Tenderness for their Chil-
 " dren might more effectually secure the Fidelity
 " of the Parents to the Commonwealth. And
 " therefore *Lepidus* himself is cruel to his own
 " Children, not he who according to Law con-
 " demns *Lepidus*." If therefore God, the more effectually to deter the *Israelites* from Idolatry, lets them know that this wou'd bring Judgments not only upon them, but upon their Children too, I don't

* P. 241.

don't know what can be reasonably objected against it; especially when it is further consider'd, that it is only on Supposition of the Children's continuing in their Parents Crimes, in which Case God wou'd, in punishing them, have a Regard both to their own Wickedness and that of their Parents: As was the Case with the *Jews* when carried into Captivity. They were themselves a very wicked Generation, chargeable with Idolatry and all Kinds of Crimes, (as appears from the Complaints of the Prophets against them;) but the Calamities inflicted on them had a Reference not only to their own Crimes, but to those of their Fathers, especially to what had been done in the Days of *Manasseh*.

Our Author indeed is pleas'd to declare, that "it must be own'd, the same Spirit (I dare not call it a Spirit of Cruelty) does not alike prevail throughout the Old Testament. The nearer we come to the Times of the Gospel, the milder it appear'd." Which he proves from that Passage of *Ezekiel*, where in opposition to that Declaration in the Decalogue, God saith, *The Soul that sinneth it shall die; the Son shall not bear the Iniquity of the Father*, &c. Ezek. 18. p. 268.

Whence this sudden Fit of Modesty came upon the Author, that he *dares not call* the Spirit of the Old Testament a *Spirit of Cruelty*, when he had call'd it so just before, I shall not inquire; but as to the pretended Opposition between the Decalogue and that Passage in *Ezekiel*, it is easily accounted for. The *Jews* pretended that they were punish'd merely for their Fathers Faults and Idolatries, as if they themselves were innocent. This was not true. And therefore to stop their Mouths, God assures them by his Prophet in the strongest manner, that provided they turn'd from their evil Ways, and did not persist in their Fathers Crimes, they

they shou'd not be punish'd merely for their Fathers Sins. That this is the Design of the Declaration here made, is very evident from the Instances produc'd, v. 14, 15, 18, 19, 20. There is nothing therefore in this inconsistent with that Declaration in the Decalogue, which relates only to those that persisted in the Crimes and Idolatries of their Fathers; in which Case, God wou'd pour forth a heavy Vengeance upon them for their own and their Fathers Sins.

In the other World indeed no Man shall be punish'd but for his own Crimes, (in which Sense it is a certain Maxim, that *the Soul that sinneth it shall die*;) but in this present State, Persons may suffer many Evils as they are the Members of a wicked Community, or as they proceed from wicked Parents and Ancestors. When a People have been long incorrigible and ripe for Judgment, God may in the Punishments he inflicts have a Regard not only to the Sins of that Generation, but to those of their Ancestors which they imitated and persisted in, and the long Continuance of which may render it more just and necessary that a signal Vengeance shou'd be inflicted upon them; which was the Case of the *Jews* at the Time of their final Destruction, when our Saviour foretold, that upon them shou'd come the Blood of all the Prophets, &c. *Matt. 23. 35.* So that neither does this furnish any Proof of a Contrast between the Spirit of the Old Testament and the New.

But in ordinary Cases it was provided by the Law of *Moses* itself, that the Children shou'd not be punish'd for the Parents Crimes. Hence King *Amaziab* spar'd the Children of those that murder'd his Father because it was written in the Law of *Moses*, *The Fathers shall not die for the Children, neither shall the Children die for the Fathers, but every*

every Man shall die for his own Sin, 2 Chron. 25.
4. Deut. 24. 16.

As to *Achan's* Case, which this Writer mentions, it was of an extraordinary Nature. As it was the first Crime of the kind, and which happen'd immediately upon the *Israelites* entring into *Canaan*, it was proper to make a signal Example of Terror in the Beginning; in which Case remarkable Instances of Severity are sometimes necessary, which at other Times and in other Circumstances might appear too rigorous. Though after all how far his Family might be accessary to his Crime, (which indeed cou'd scarce be perpetrated without their Knowledge, since he hid the *Babylonish* Garment, &c. in his Tent, to which they might probably be aiding and assisting) we cannot tell.

I shall on this Occasion take notice of what this Writer elsewhere insists upon at some Length, and which, if it were true, wou'd go further to prove the Charge he has advanc'd against the Spirit of the Old Testament as a Spirit of Cruelty, than any of the other Instances he has produc'd. It is in p. 94, 95, *. &c. where he pretends to shew, that human Sacrifices were allow'd and even prescrib'd in the Law of *Moses*. But how does he attempt to prove this? Is it from any express Passages in the Law directing to such Sacrifices? 'Tis evident that there are no such Directions. There are Rules given for the Sacrifices of Beasts and Birds, with great Particularity; informing them what Kind of Beasts and Birds were to be offered, in what Manner, and with what Rites and Ceremonies, even to the smallest Circumstance. If therefore it had been the Design of God that any human Sacrifices shou'd be offered, there wou'd have been much more particular Directions in this Case, which

* P. 81. 82;

which was of much greater Importance, and we shou'd have been distinctly told what Persons, on what Occasions, and in what Manner they shou'd be sacrific'd. There being no Directions given at all in this Case, and such particular ones in the other, is a Demonstration that no such Sacrifices were requir'd or intended; especially since they were commanded to adhere strictly to the Law, and neither to add to it nor diminish from it. That Passage therefore which he produces from *Lev. 27. 29.* concerning such as were devoted of Men, or from among Men, *who were surely to be put to death,* cannot be justly interpreted as relating to human Oblations, of which there is not one Word in the whole Law, or as allowing Persons * to offer up their Children or Slaves in Sacrifice; for they had not a Power over their Lives, but only to devote them to the Service of the Priests or Sanctuary, which by the unanimous Consent of all the Jewish Writers is all that is intended in the 28th Verse. And what is added in the 29th Verse, must be understood as relating to those who were devoted to Destruction by a solemn *Chærem* or Curse, as the *Canaanites* were for their execrable Wickedness by God's own Appointment, (an Instance of which we particularly have in *Jericho*, *Jos. 6. 17.*) and such of the *Israelites* as fell into open Idolatry, this being a Breach of their fundamental Covenant and Constitution, who were devoted to Destruction in the Law it self, *Ex. 22. 20. Deut. 13. 6, 8, 9, 15, 17.* and for Persons thus accursed and devoted in the Name of the Lord to Destruction, no Price or Redemption was to be accepted. To which it may be added, that in some extraordinary Cases, Persons were by publick Authority brought under a *Chærem* or Curse, by which they were devoted

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* He that wou'd see this fully clear'd, may consult *Selden de Jure Nat. & Gent. lib. 4. c. 6, 7, 9, 10, 11.*

to Death in the Name of the Lord, in case of their violating the publick Appointment. An Instance of this we have *Judg.* 21. 5. where the general Assembly of the whole People of *Israel* had brought themselves under a great Oath or Curse, that *who-soever did not come up to the Lord to Mizpeh*, and ingage in the War undertaken for the Punishment of an execrable Wickedness, *shou'd surely be put to death*. In consequence of which the Inhabitants of *Jabesh-Gilead* were destroy'd for not coming, *v.* 8, 10, 11. Our Author indeed thinks this the *oddest Quarrel that ever was*, p. 348 *. and abuses the *Israelites* on the account of it. But for my part, I cannot but look upon it as a great Instance of national Virtue, that the Body of the People shew'd such a Resentment as they did of a horrid Crime; and I cannot but think both that the *Benjamites* by chusing rather to enter into War with their Brethren than give up the guilty Criminals as they were requir'd to do, deserv'd the severe Punishment that besel them; (and that this is agreeable to the Law of Nations, *Grotius* shews *de Jure Belli & Pacis*, lib. 2. cap. 21. Sect. 2, 3, 4.) and that the Inhabitants of *Jabesh-Gilead*, who knew the solemn Curse or Oath pronounc'd in the Assembly of the whole Nation, and yet acted in contradiction to it, were themselves chargeable with their own Destruction. As to what this Author takes upon him peremptorily to affirm, p. 95 †. that *it is own'd by all, that the Captives taken in War, which fell to the Lord's Share*, as he expresses it, *were to be slain*; this is far from being true. In the only Instance that I remember of Captives taken in War, where there is an express Mention that Part of them were to be set apart from the rest of the Prey as a *Tribute to the Lord*, they were not to be slain, but given to the Priests and

* P. 315. † P. 82.

and Levites, *Numb.* 31. 28, 29, 30. The *Syrians* mention'd *2 Kings* 6. 22. were properly God's Captives; yet he wou'd not suffer them to be slain. And it is there also intimated, that it was not usual for the *Israelites* to slay the Captives they took in War.

The Instance of *Abraham's* offering up his Son *Isaac*, which the Author mentions on this Occasion, proves the quite contrary to what he produces it for. For tho' God requir'd *Abraham*, as the most signal Proof to all Generations of his Self-denial and absolute Obedience and Resignation to the divine Will, to be ready to give up his own Son to Death at his Command, (and a noble Proof it was of his intire Submission to God and steady Faith in him, who he did not doubt in this Case wou'd raise him from the dead, as the Apostle observes, *Hebr.* 11. 19.) yet his not suffering him to execute his Purpose, but providing a Ram in his Son's stead, plainly shew'd that human Sacrifices were not what God approv'd, not even in this extraordinary Instance; and probably it was so order'd with this View, that no body might make use of this as a Precedent.

The other Instance he produces of *Jephtha's* Vow is no more to the purpose. For supposing he really sacrificed his Daughter (about which the Learned are not agreed) this is no Proof that the Levitical Law requir'd it, except it can be shewn that *Jephtha* had either Precept or Example for it, or that he was not capable of mistaking and doing a wrong Thing thro' a misguided Zeal for God. And all the Jewish Writers with one consent both ancient and modern that suppose *Jephtha* to have sacrificed his Daughter, do also agree that he did very wrong in doing so, and that the Law of *Moses* never requir'd or countenanc'd any such thing. Nor ought this Author to suppose

without Proof that this is what the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* commends him for; who does not mention one Word of his Sacrifice, tho' he does *Abraham's* offering up his Son *Isaac*; and *Jephtha* did many other Things for which he well deserv'd to be rank'd by that Writer among his Heroes, as well as *Gideon*, *Samson*, &c.

But how comes it, if human Sacrifices were allow'd and prescrib'd in the Law, and in use among the *Jews*, that we never read of *David*, or any of the good Kings of *Judah* offering up any such Sacrifice even in the time of their greatest Extremity, tho' these, on Supposition there were such Sacrifices at all, must have been esteem'd the most valuable of all others? We read indeed of idolatrous Kings that did so, as the King of *Moab*, 2 *Kings* 3. 27. And *Abaz* and others made their Children pass thro' the Fire. But no such thing do we ever read of any of the pious Kings, tho' they wou'd certainly have done it, at least on some extraordinary Occasions, if they had look'd upon it as prescrib'd in the divine Law.

The Passage this Writer cites from *Micah* 6. 6, 7, 8. has scarce the Shadow of an Argument. He observes indeed, that *here the sacrificing of a Man's own Children is mention'd equally with the sacrificing of Beasts, which is allow'd to be a Jewish Institution.* But it must be consider'd that the Prophet is there mentioning the various Ways which the People took, or might possibly suppose effectual, for expiating their Sins, and propitiating an offended Deity. In order to which it was usual for them to join their own Inventions with God's Institutions, and the idolatrous Rites of the neighbouring Nations, with those prescrib'd in the Law of *Moses*; and particularly to the sacrificing of Beasts prescrib'd in the Law, they added the sacrificing their own Children, which, as appears from many Passages

sages they frequently put in practice in the Valley of the Son of *Hinnom*, tho' nothing cou'd be more expressly forbidden by God than this was; and probably they look'd upon these Oblations as the most valuable of all others, and as having most of an expiatory Virtue. And as they join'd all these Things in their Practice, tho' so widely different, so the Prophet mentions them together, in order to shew that none of these Things cou'd procure them the Favour of God. Nothing short of substantial Piety, Righteousness, and Charity.

But to this Passage produc'd by the Author, I may justly oppose another which ranks the slaying or sacrificing of Men among Things which God expressly forbids and abhors. It is *Is. 66. 3.* *He that killeth an Ox, is as if he slew a Man; he that sacrificeth a Lamb, as if he cut off a Dog's Neck; he that offereth an Oblation, as if he offered Swine's Blood; he that burneth Incense, as if he blessed an Idol.* The Design of which Passage is evidently this, to signify to the *Jews*, that tho' the sacrificing an Ox, or a Lamb, and burning Incense were Things which God requir'd, and when rightly perform'd from sincere and penitent Hearts, and accompanied with the Practice of Righteousness, were acceptable to him; yet when offered by those that indulg'd themselves in a Course of presumptuous Sin and Wickedness, were as displeasing to God as those Things which he most expressly condemn'd and abhorr'd; among which are reckon'd the slaying or sacrificing a Man, or a Dog, or a Swine, which were Animals expressly forbidden to be sacrific'd; or as the blessing an Idol, than which nothing cou'd be more severely prohibited in the Law. This Passage affords a convincing Proof, that human Sacrifices were held in the highest Abomination, and were amongst those Things that God most expressly condemn'd and abhorr'd. Ac-

cordingly we find it is often mention'd as one of the Sins of the *Canaanites*, and for which they were to be exterminated, that they offered their Children to *Moloch*, and the *Israelites* are in the strongest manner forbidden to imitate them in such inhuman Practices, *Levit.* 18, 21, 24. 20. 2. *Deut.* 12. 30, 31. The *Psalmist* mentions it as one of the greatest Crimes the *Israelites* were guilty of, that *they sacrificed their Sons and their Daughters unto Devils, and shed innocent Blood, even the Blood of their Sons and of their Daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the Idols of Canaan: and the Land was polluted with Blood.* *Psal.* 106. 37, 38. where it is evident he does not blame them merely for offering these Sacrifices unto Idols and not to God, but he blames the Cruelty and Inhumanity of these Oblations; that they shed the innocent Blood of their Sons and Daughters, so that the Land was polluted with Blood; or, as *Jeremiah* charges them on the like Occasion, they *filled Jerusalem with the Blood of Innocents,* *Jer.* 19. 4, 5.

The last Thing this Writer mentions to shew that the *Jewish* Law allow'd human Sacrifices is, that if it had not been so, " the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* wou'd not, at least without some Apology for the Lawfulness of human Sacrifices, have declar'd one such Sacrifice, in which the same Person was both Sacrificer and Sacrifice, to be of infinite Value, in saying *Christ offered up himself; and that He put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself.*"

Not to take notice at present of his Sneer at the Doctrine of Christ's Satisfaction and Sacrifice, which shall be consider'd afterwards; I shall only observe, that the Course of the Argument made use of by the Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, affords a strong Proof that there were no human Sacrifices known or allow'd in the Law. This
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Gentleman observes, that that Author endeavours to shew the *Hebrews*, that the "Blood of the Beast that was sacrific'd was of no Value in comparison of the Blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without Spot to God." But if there had been any such Thing as human Sacrifices allow'd or prescrib'd under the Law, he wou'd have set himself to shew, that the Blood of the Men that were then offered was of no Value in comparison of the Blood of Christ. It is evident to the last degree, that he all along supposes the highest and most valuable Sacrifices under the Law, to be those of Bulls and Goats; and therefore sets himself to prove, that it was impossible for these to take away Sin. And indeed there being no higher Sacrifices than these prescrib'd or used on the Day of Expiation, when the most solemn Atonement was made for the Sins of the whole Nation, is a Demonstration that these were the most valuable Oblations under the Law, and consequently that there were no human Sacrifices allow'd there at all.

More might easily be offered on this Subject, but I think this is sufficient to invalidate the Attempt the Author makes to prove, that human Sacrifices were allow'd in the Law of *Moses*, tho' it is very probable he does not himself seriously believe it.



C H A P. XIV.

The Mosaick Account of Man's original Dignity, and the Fall, vindicated against the Author's Objections.

OUR Author in his 14th Chapter, where he undertakes to examine Dr. Clarke's Discourse, &c. particularly finds fault with his supposing, that there was an original uncorrupted State of the human Nature, and that Man is now fallen from that State into a State of great Corruption and Degeneracy. He treats this as a *new Scheme*, though it be what Christians have generally maintain'd; and particularly sets himself to expose and ridicule the Account that is given in the Books of *Moses*, both of Man's original Dignity, and of the Fall. I shall distinctly consider what he offers with regard to each of these.

The History of *Adam* and *Eve* given us by *Moses* is very short, but it is sufficient to give us a noble Idea of the Dignity of the first human Pair. The Earth is represented as richly furnish'd and adorn'd with all things necessary for Man's Reception and Entertainment; all the various kinds of brute Animals ready form'd; and then Man makes his Appearance last of all, as the Crown and Ornament of God's other Works. The Account of his Creation is introduced with a remarkable Solemnity. God is represented as entering into a kind of Counsel for the Formation of so noble a Creature, and is said to have created Man *after his own Image and his own Likeness*, Gen. i. 26, 27. than which nothing can be more expressive of the original

original Dignity of the human Nature. And particularly the Image of God in Scripture has a Reference to the Dispositions and Qualities of the Mind, and is explain'd by the Apostle *Paul* to consist in Knowledge, Righteousness, and true Holiness, *Eph. 4. 24. Col. 3. 10.* Man is also represented, as immediately at his first Creation invested with a Dominion over the Earth, and all the Orders of Beings in it. As a Sign of this his Dominion, as well as a Proof of his extensive Knowledge, we find him giving the Animals Names as their Lord, and at the same time sensible that none of these was proper to be his Companion. And therefore a noble Creature was form'd by the creating Hand of God out of his Substance, whom he immediately knew and loved.

Such was the first human Pair, who are introduced as created at once in a State of Maturity, capable of conversing with one another, and with their Maker; and constituted soon after their Creation in the most delightful part of the Earth, richly furnish'd and adorn'd with a Variety of Provisions by the liberal Hand of the Creator; who yet was pleased to reserve the Fruit of one Tree, from which Man was required to abstain, for this end among others, to make him sensible that he had not an unlimited Dominion over these Things, but was under the Dominion of a higher Lord; to whom he ow'd all his Gifts and Blessings, and to whom he particularly was obliged to render this outward Act of Fealty, an easy Acknowledgment and visible Testimony of his Dependence. Besides which we may suppose, that such a Command was given him immediately after his Creation, to instruct and habituate him to govern his Appetites, and keep them in a constant Subjection to his Reason,

This

This is the Sum of the *Mosaick* Account of Man's original Formation, and which indeed is a noble Representation, and tends to give us a high Idea both of Man's original Dignity, and of the divine Favour and Goodness towards his yet innocent Creature. It is evident from this brief Account, that Man came into the World in a State of Maturity of Body and Mind, with the use of Reason and Language; his Mind was enrich'd with a large Stock of Ideas immediately communicated to him by God himself, and Language was given him to express those Ideas, and he was invested with a glorious Dignity and Dominion.

But this Account does not satisfy our Author. "One would be almost apt to imagine (says he, p. 254 *.) "that the Author of the Book of *Genesis* thought, that Words had Ideas naturally "fix'd to them, and not by Consent. Otherwise "how can we account for his supposing, that God "brought all Animals before *Adam* as soon as he "was created, and he gave them Names; and "that *whatsoever Adam called every living Creature, that was the Name thereof*, Gen. 2. 19." And again, p. 385 †. he is at a loss to conceive "how *Eve* could entertain a Conference with the "Serpent, even before Consent had given a "Meaning to Sounds." If I understand this Author aright, he supposes that *Adam* and *Eve*, the first of the human Race, could have no Language but what they gradually learn'd and form'd themselves by mutual Consent, agreeing to annex such and such Sounds to signify such and such particular Ideas. And at this rate they must have been a long time without any regular Language at all. Nor is it easy to know what two human Creatures could be able to do this way, if brought together and left merely to themselves, without ever having heard any

* P. 228.

† P. 349.

any Language or articulate Sound. How much nobler is the Account given in Scripture, that God introduced the first human Pair into the World in the full Use of Reason and Speech, both furnishing their Minds with a Stock of Ideas, and with a Power of expressing them; so that they were able to converse together, as became rational Beings, and to communicate their Thoughts at once? Is not this far more rational, more for the Honour of God, and becoming the Dignity of the human Nature, than to suppose them brought into the World in Maturity of Body, but their Minds utterly destitute of Ideas, without Knowledge, without Language, or articulate Sounds, incapable of conversing together, but by Signs, and thus continuing for many Years? And yet this is the goodly Scheme this Author would introduce, instead of that more noble and rational one given by *Moses*.

But he thinks the sacred History of *Adam* and *Eve* is inconsistent with the supposed Dignity of the first human Pair. That “the most that can be
“gather’d from it is, that the first Pair came into
“the World in every sense naked, destitute of all
“that Knowledge Experience gave their Posterity.
“And therefore God, the better to support them
“in this State of universal Ignorance, planted a
“Garden for them, that they might live on the
“Fruits of it, p. 385 *.” But it has been shewn, that the Account given us of the first human Pair, though short, is noble, and tends to give us a high Notion of the Dignity and Perfection of our first Parents. Nor is their being represented as *naked* any Proof to the contrary. All that can be concluded from it is, that then they stood in no need of Garments as now, the Climate being perfectly mild and temperate, and their Bodies perfectly
well-

* P. 348, 349.

well-constituted. What he adds about God's *planting a Garden* for them, as if this was a Proof of their *universal Ignorance*, is too ridiculous to deserve an Answer. To suppose them placed in the most delightful Part of the Earth, richly furnish'd for their Entertainment, has nothing in it but what is very agreeable to Man's original Dignity, and the divine Goodness towards his yet innocent Creature. But this Author seems to find fault that God did not bring the new-form'd human Pair into a desert Place, waste and uncultivated, and leave them to plant all the Trees themselves, and so be several Years before they either saw the Trees brought to Maturity, or tasted the Fruit.

The Author goes on, "How weak was their Reason? how strong their Appetites? when they could not abstain (the sole Command given them) from the Fruit of but one Tree; in a Garden too, where must needs be an infinite Variety, and the choicest Fruit," *ibid.* But all that their being overcome by the Temptation proves, is not that their Reason was weak, but that they did not make that use of it which they ought, and which it was in their power to have done. Their being overcome by the Temptation, does not prove that therefore it was above their Strength to resist it; except the Author will lay this down for a Principle, that whenever any Man is drawn aside by a Temptation, this is a certain Proof that that Temptation was what he had not power to resist; and then it might be said, that he was not to be blam'd for not doing what was not in his power to do. Thus he has found out an admirable Plea to render all Men excusable for every Sin they commit; and that every Man when he sins, sins necessarily. But the contrary is evident. We daily see Persons overcome by Temptations, which

which they might easily have resisted. They fall not for want of Power, but for want of exercising the Power they have. And sometimes great and wise Men have fallen by Temptations, which those of much less Abilities easily resist.

Indeed the Author's Argument, if it proves any thing, tends to prove, that Sin could not come into the World at all; that is, to prove that that could not be, which all the World knows has been and is. For whatever we suppose the first Sin to have been, (and it must be supposed that some one Man sinned first, and that before he sinned he was innocent) it might be argued, if the Temptation was strong, it was inconsistent with God's Goodness to suffer it; if it was weak, Man was so too, or he would not have been overcome by it; and in this case the Reflection on the divine Goodness is the same. For a weak Temptation may be as disproportionate to one supposed rude and ignorant, as a much stronger one to one of greater Knowledge, and stronger Faculties. Our Author, if he has a sincere Regard to natural Religion, is as much concern'd to answer this as we are. But it is easily supposable, that a Creature might be made innocent, and yet not absolutely impeccable; so constituted, as to have it easily in his power to have persisted in his Integrity and Innocence, and yet capable of being drawn aside, if he neglected to exercise the Reason God had given him. And this was the Case of our first Parents.

The Temptation offer'd to them did not want plausible Appearances. It was subtilly adapted to their Temper and Circumstances. The Tempter applied himself to the Reason, and not merely to the sensual Appetite. He did not merely argue from the Beauty and Deliciousness of the Fruit; but from the Virtue it would have to enlarge their Knowledge, and raise them to a still higher Degree

gree of Perfection and Dignity than what they had already obtain'd. This was a Temptation suited to noble Beings; and they who well knew that God had just created the World, might easily suppose it very possible that the Creator might have annex'd a wonderful Virtue to this Tree. Its being distinguish'd by a divine Prohibition from all the rest, might excite their Curiosity, and lead them to think there was something extraordinary and mysterious in the Nature of that Plant, which they wanted to explore. This might prepare them for believing the Account given of it by the Serpent. And its being given by a brute Creature, who might pretend he himself had experienced its Virtue, and had by eating of it been rais'd to the Use both of Reason and Speech, might make them more apt to credit it. This might lead them to question how such a Command came to be given, and by degrees to doubt whether they had not some way or other misapprehended it, or whether the Threatning was only *in terrorem*, without any design of being rigorously executed. It was *Eve's* too great Curiosity and Ambition that led her aside; her Fault was leaning too much to her own Reasoning, in opposition to an express divine Command. And our Author above all others ought not to wonder at our first Parents being overcome by such a Temptation, or to think this was a Proof that they were utterly rude and ignorant, since if he had been there, he must certainly have argued that God could not give such a Command as this (since it is impossible for him to give any positive Precepts) and that it was unreasonable, and therefore not to be obey'd. And why should he and others, high Pretenders to Reason, bring it as a Proof of a want of Reason and Wisdom in *Eve* to do that, which, if they argue consistently, their Wisdom must have led them to do as well as she?

But

But though the Temptation did not want some fair Appearances, it was far from being superior to the human Force. It was what they might easily have resisted, if they had exercised the Powers and Abilities God had given them, and which it was easy for them to exercise. They knew that God was their Maker and supreme Lord, who had an absolute Right to all their Obedience. They were surrounded with the Instances of his Goodness, and therefore knew that he could have no Design contrary to their Happiness, and was incapable of envying their Felicity. And therefore they might be sure he had wise and good Reasons for that particular Injunction, though they were not acquainted with them; and ought to have hearken'd to no Suggestions at all, how plausible soever, against his express Command. Their Crime therefore was inexcusable. They needed only to have summon'd their considering Powers, and this Consideration to them was not difficult, and the specious Illusions would have soon vanish'd. Their giving way to harsh Thoughts of God, and of the Reasonableness of his Command, and not being content with the eminent Rank assign'd them in the Creation, was a manifest Breach of their Allegiance; a Revolt from their Maker and supreme Lord, who had done such great Things for them. And that was an Aggravation of their Crime, which this Author mentions, that *they did not abstain from the Fruit of but one Tree*, when God requir'd it as an Instance of Homage to him, and an Acknowledgment of his Sovereignty, at the same time that he allow'd them so great a Variety, and a full Liberty in all the rest.

There is one Passage more which this Writer produces, to shew that *the supposed high State of Perfection in Adam, is a giving the Lye to the History*; and that is, that “this very perfect Man,
“ not-

“ notwithstanding all the original Dignity of his
 “ Nature, had no better Excuse for his yielding
 “ to the first Temptation, than that *the Woman*
 “ *whom thou gavest to be with me, gave me of the*
 “ *Tree and I did eat*, p. 389 *.” But I can’t com-
 prehend the Force of this Remark. I think the
 Excuse he brings the very best and most plausible
 that could be made, and the only one the Case
 could admit of. *Adam* did not pretend to argue
 the Case with God, or to give Reasons for his Dis-
 obedience, when he was sensible those Reasons
 were not of sufficient weight. And this was no
 Argument of his Folly, but rather of the Good-
 ness of his Understanding. But he artfully fixes
 upon that which alone could have the Appearance
 of an Excuse, and seem’d the most proper, though
 not to justify, yet to extenuate and alleviate his
 Crime; and that was, that it proceeded from a
 too great Tendernefs and Love to his Wife, whom
 God had so lately given him for his dear Compa-
 nion, which was a Weakness that he hoped a mer-
 ciful God would forgive.

But our Author further urges against the sup-
 posed original Dignity and Perfection of our first
 Parents; “ What Dignity, what Perfection could
 “ *Adam’s* Nature have, that the Nature of his
 “ Posterity has not? are they not as much form’d
 “ after the Image of their Maker? are not their
 “ Souls as much immediately from God as *Adam’s*?
 “ and are not their Bodies exactly made after the
 “ same manner?” p. 389. But not to urge that
 both the Soul and Body of *Adam* came from God
 in a more immediate manner than those of his Off-
 spring, viz. without the Instrumentality of earthly
 Parents; I would only observe, that all that these
 Questions prove, is only that *Adam* was a Creature
 of the same Species with his Posterity, which will
 be

be easily granted: but if the Sameness of the human Nature in all that is essential to it be consistent, as it manifestly is, with a vast Difference between some and others of the same Species, as to the Perfection of their Natures, the Argument is lost. It cannot be denied, that though all Men have the same common human Nature, yet some of the human Race differ vastly from others both in Strength and Beauty of Body, and in the Extent and Vigour of their Faculties, and in the moral Disposition of their Minds. And it may easily be supposed, that there might be a Man raised to a far greater Degree of Perfection both in Body and Mind than any Man on Earth, and yet have the same essential Faculties of the human Nature, and be of the same Species with the rest of Mankind. Nor can I see any Absurdity in supposing the first Man, who was to be the Parent and Model of the rest, to be invested with a high Degree of Perfection. It would have been on many accounts improper, that Man should have been created at first in an Infant State. And if we suppose him created in a State of Maturity, it is reasonable to think, that as he was made perfect in Body at once, without going through the gradual Stages of Infancy and Childhood; so he was also created in an answerable Perfection and Maturity of Mind, and with a great Degree of Wisdom and Knowledge. It cannot be thought, that the kind Parent of his Being would thrust him forth into the World as a huge overgrown Infant, utterly unfurnish'd with Knowledge and Ideas. It is reasonable to suppose, that the Furniture of his Mind equal'd the Dignity of his Body, and that he was introduced into the World in the Vigour and Perfection of his Powers whether of Body or Soul, with a Dignity becoming so noble a Creature. And as his Heart was untainted with any corrupt Dispositions, or evil

Habits, and his Mind uncorrupted with wrong Prejudices, and his Passions and Appetites regular, (which must necessarily be supposed, except we say God made him actually corrupt from the Beginning) this alone must have given him a great Advantage, which his Posterity had not, who come into a World where they imbibe evil Inclinations and Prejudices in their Childhood, and must have made it easy for him to have persisted in his Integrity.

It appears from what has been offer'd, how little our Author has been able to say, against the Account given in Scripture of the original Dignity of the human Nature. Let us now consider, whether he has been more successful in his Endeavours to expose the Account there given of the Fall of Man.

That Mankind are now in a very corrupt State, is a Matter of Fact capable of as clear a Proof as any Thing whatsoever. The Scriptures often represent this Corruption of Mankind in a strong and lively manner; and it has been own'd and complain'd of by the best and wisest Men in all Ages and Nations. Historians, Poets, Philosophers, Politicians, all have acknowledged it. The most thinking Men among the Heathens were very sensible, that the human Nature is now in a very degenerate distemper'd State, that it has a kind of innate Pravity cleaving to it, though they were puzzled to account how it came. He that would see many Testimonies of the most eminent Heathens to this purpose, *Plato, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Cebes, Maximus Tyrius, Plotinus, Hierocles, Jamblicus*, &c. may consult the learned Mr. *Howe's* 2d Part of *The living Temple*, p. 111, & seq.

The true Question then is not, whether Mankind be corrupt; for this Author himself supposes the Corruption of Mankind to be so great and universal,

fal, that there is little Reason to hope it will ever be otherwise, p. 407. But the Question is, Whether the human Nature was always just as it is at present, or whether originally and at its first Formation it was more pure and upright ; and consequently, whether its present Weakness and Disorder be owing to its original Formation, or to a Lapse and Defection from that original State ?

Any one that duly considers the human Nature, may be sensible that one End for which Man was originally design'd, was to know and love, to worship and obey his Creator and Benefactor. There are many things still in the Nature of Man to shew that this was the original Intention of his Being. And at the same time it is evident in fact, that the generality of Mankind have been and are prone to entertain unworthy Notions of the supreme Being ; that instead of a rational and spiritual Worship, they have generally fallen into absurd and ridiculous Rites ; that instead of pure and undefiled Religion, an absurd Superstition almost every-where prevails ; and that there is a strange Aversion and Disinclination to that devout Adoration, that Love and Contemplation of the supreme Being, which one should think would be one of the noblest Exercises of a rational Mind.

Another End for which the human Nature was manifestly form'd and design'd, was for the Exercise of mutual Benevolence. This appears from the kind social Affections implanted in the Heart of Man. But at the same time it must be own'd, that these friendly Affections and Dispositions are generally very weak in their Influence in the present State of the human Nature ; they are far from being so strong and vigorous as might be expected, if the human Mind was in a sound and healthful State. Any one that is acquainted with the History of Mankind, will find it almost nothing else but

an Account of the Attempts of some to defraud, to injure, and oppress others of the same Species. And a benevolent active extensive Charity, though much talk'd of, has been in all Ages and still is a rare Thing.

Again, Man was evidently design'd to exercise and maintain a due Government over his own Appetites and Passions; and the Harmony and good Order of the human Nature, manifestly consists in the due ballancing of these, and in the Presidency of Reason over them all. But 'tis evident, that in the most of Mankind Passion and unreasonable Appetite governs. Would it be thus in a sound State of the human Nature? Was this at first design'd, that Reason should be subject and the Passions reign? or, was Man originally so constituted, that that which was design'd to govern, should be so weak in its Influence, and that which was design'd to be subject, so headstrong?

Thus all Appearances lead us to conclude, that the human Nature is not now what it was originally made and design'd to be. There are many Remains of its ancient Dignity, and at the same time many unhappy Proofs and Tokens of its present Degeneracy. If the human Nature be in its original Integrity and Innocence, whence is it that every Man is a Sinner when adult? Why should it not be supposed, that Virtue should in all Ages have more Followers than Vice, since it has such genuine native Charms, and so many Advantages to recommend it? And why should not true Religion be more common in all Ages and Countries than Superstition, as being in itself far more amiable, and more agreeable to right Reason and uncorrupted Nature?

Our Author himself, p. 384*. upon Dr. *Clark's* saying, that the Philosophers did not know the Grounds and Circumstances of Man's present Condition,

dition, remarks upon it thus; *If so, they did not understand human Nature, and how Prejudices and Passions work on Mankind.* Where he plainly supposes, that all that are acquainted with human Nature, must be sensible that in the present State of Mankind Prejudices and Passions have a mighty Influence upon them, to draw them aside from that which is good. But why should not Prejudices in favour of true Religion and Virtue, which is infinitely more amiable, more fair and excellent, have an equal, and a greater and more general Influence, than Prejudices on the side of Superstition and Vice? Why are Men carried so generally and so strongly to the latter, and have such faint Inclinations to the former, so easily overborn? Is it possible to account for this, if we suppose the human Nature in its original Rectitude, and in its sound uncorrupted State?

It has been already observed, Part I. p. 239. that this Author complains of the strange Biass Mankind naturally have towards Superstition; and that he ascribes this to a certain innate original Weakness in the human Nature. And certainly, if any thing can be call'd a Distemper and a Disease, this Proneness to Superstition may be justly call'd so; and so this Author must think, since he makes this the most dreadful of all Evils, worse than Atheism itself, and productive of infinite Mischiefs to Mankind. In his Scheme therefore, the Corruption that is in the World is the natural Effect of Man's original Make and Constitution; which is to suppose God himself to be the Author of that Weakness to which the human Nature is now subject. But according to the Scripture, God made Man upright originally in a State of Integrity, and his present Corruption is owing to Man's Defection from it. God indeed permitted this Defection, but there is as much Difference between God's first

forming the human Nature in a disorder'd distemper'd State, and his suffering it afterwards to fall into such a State, as there is between his causing Evil and his permitting it. The first of which has been always thought blasphemous to the Deity, the other must necessarily be acknowledged by all that own a Providence.

Our Author indeed can see no Difference between these. He asks, p. 389 *. "Where is the Difference in relation to the Goodness of God, and the Happiness of Mankind, between God's creating them in a State of universal Degeneracy and Corruption, or causing them by the Folly of *Adam*, which infinite Wisdom could not but foresee, to fall unavoidably into that bad State?" Indeed as he puts the Question, there would be no great Difference. But here we have just Reason to complain of gross Misrepresentation. He represents those whom he opposes, as supposing that God *caused Adam's Fall*, when he knows they maintain, according to the Scriptures, that the Fault was to be laid wholly on his own voluntary Defection. But says the Author, *infinite Wisdom could not but foresee the Folly of Adam*, and the consequent Corruption of his Posterity. I can't see what Argument can be raised from this, except upon this Principle, that God is to be reputed the Author of whatever Evil he foresees and does not prevent, when it is in his power to do so; which is directly to charge him as the Author of all the Sins and Disorders that are in the World. If this Writer had a true Regard to the Honour of God, he would not advance such Arguments as these, which if they had any thing in them, would subvert natural Religion as well as revealed.

He concludes all that he offers on this Head thus: "I may venture to say, that the Doctor's Description of human Nature, in all but one Pair (and
" that

* P. 352.

“ that too perhaps but for a Day) is a Libel on
“ the Dignity of human Nature, and an high
“ Reflection on the Wisdom and Goodness of its
“ Author, in placing them without any Faults of
“ theirs, in an unavoidable State of Degeneracy
“ and Corruption for 4000 Years together, and
“ continuing the greatest Part still in the same
“ State, p. 390*.” The latter part of this Remark, which has a Reference to the State of the heathen World, has been consider’d, and the Disingenuity of it exposed, Part I. p. 103. At present I shall only observe, that I cannot see why he who asserts the original Dignity of the human Nature, and supposes it to have been made at first in a State of Integrity and Perfection much superior to what it now is; and that Man’s present Corruption is an Effect of a culpable Defection from that original State; should be reputed to write a Libel on the human Nature, and to speak less honourably of it and of the divine Goodness, than he that asserts that Man was at his first Creation just the same that he is now; a weak superstitious Creature, govern’d by Passions and Prejudices, his Reason weak and his Appetites strong; which is to make God in a proper Sense the Author of the present weak distemper’d State of the human Nature.

But the Doctor confines the Perfection and Integrity of the human Nature to *one Pair*, and *perhaps but for a Day*. But is it not better to assert this original Dignity of the human Nature in the first Pair, than not at all? As God created only two at first to be the Parents and Fountains of the human Race, from whom according to the Law of their Creation all the rest were to proceed, if these two were made in a State of Purity and Integrity, and invested with a high Dignity, this vindicates the divine Goodness. And it is nothing

to the purpose whether they continued in that State for a long or a short Time, (though the History given us of it will not allow us to suppose they fell the first Day) if they might have persisted in it had it not been their own Fault, as they certainly might and ought to have done; and indeed, all things consider'd, there was far greater Probability of their doing so than of the contrary. But if they corrupted their own Nature, and transmitted the Seeds of that Corruption to their Posterity, the Fault was not in God but in themselves, and on them alone to be charged. I am sensible that it is difficult to account for the Transmission of that Corruption; but our not knowing the manner how it is done, is no Argument at all against the Truth and Reality of the thing. *Men indeed at all times owe their Existence to God,* as this Author observes. God creates and produces them, but it is according to the Laws of this Species of Beings who were made to propagate one another, so that in this Production earthly Parents are the Instruments. And how far they may be the Instruments in conveying a Corruption or Pravity, is what we cannot distinctly explain; but to make this alone a Reason for denying it, would argue great Rashness and want of Reflection. I must own, I think it as conceivable how the Soul may be infected in the Womb, and how the Seed may have a vitiating Quality, and be the Means of conveying a Weakness and Corruption to the Animal arising from that Seed, as how an Animal is generated or propagated at all; and in what Manner and by what Ties and Ligaments the Soul is united to the Body, a material Being to an immaterial; and how a Body disposed after a certain manner may be capable of having a great Influence on the Affections and Operations of the Mind, and on its Dispositions
intel-

intellectual and moral ; which yet cannot be denied to be certain Fact.

God has in his inexhaustible Wisdom made Creatures of different Species ; some pure unembodied Spirits, and some Spirits united to Body ; some probably created all at once, not deriving Being from one another, nor dependent on each other for their Existence ; others he created successively according to a Law or Order he established in the beginning, whereby it was provided that they should be derived from one another, and should be Instruments in producing one another ; and therefore he created a few Individuals at first, from whom all the rest were to proceed. This was the Case of Man. And if the first Parents of the human Race corrupted themselves, and became the Fountains of Corruption, deriving a tainted impure Nature to their Offspring, the Fault was not in God who made them sound and upright, that they might transmit the human Nature in its uncorrupted Purity and Integrity to their Posterity. It was proper our first Parents should be left to their Liberty ; and if in consequence of their abusing their Liberty, and falling from God, Corruption is derived to their Descendants, a wise and merciful God knows how to make proper Allowances for human Frailty. We may be sure he will deal with all Mankind with the utmost Equity, and can take occasion from thence to make his own Wisdom and Mercy and Grace more illustrious, in healing and recovering our lapsed Natures ; and accordingly the Scriptures open a new and glorious Scene, assuring us that there is a Saviour provided for Mankind, in whom they should be restored as in *Adam* they fell.

Upon the whole, the Difference between the Author's Scheme and that of the Scripture, as I have already observed, is this, That that Weakness

and Disorder of Nature, which the Scripture supposes to be the Effect of the voluntary Defection of our first Parents, the Fountains and Representatives of the human Race, he supposes to be the Result of the original Constitution of the human Nature, which is to ascribe it properly and immediately to God himself as the Author. In his Scheme Man's present Weakness is and always was from the Beginning properly natural; according to the Scriptures it might easily have been avoided, if our first Parents had preserved their Integrity, which they might easily have done. In his Scheme Men are left to themselves, to struggle out of it as well as they can, merely by their own Force; according to the Scriptures, there is a Remedy provided for recovering our lapsed Natures, and restoring us to the divine Image. And therefore I don't see what Pretence this Writer has to blame the Scripture-Account, which is far more for the Honour of God and the Comfort of Mankind, and gives a far more advantageous Idea of the divine Goodness than his own.

Having offer'd this in general concerning the original Grounds of Man's present corrupt State, I shall now proceed to a more distinct and particular Consideration of the Author's Objections against the Account of the Fall of our first Parents, which is recorded in the sacred Writings. His Objections are laid together in p. 385*, &c.

His first Objection, that it is hard to conceive how *Eve could entertain a Conference with a Serpent, incapable of human Voice*, with what he offers afterwards concerning *the original serpentine Nature being too subtle for the original human Nature*, proceeds upon the Supposition that it was literally a brute Serpent and no more that is here intended, which he himself owns is denied by the Generality of

* P. 349, &c.

of Christians, and therefore this Objection is of no force against them. What he offers to shew, that it is merely the brute Serpent that is to be understood here, shall be consider'd afterwards.

He next thinks it strange, that "tho' Custom
" has made it shameful to go without Clothes in
" those Places where Clothes are worn, the first
" Pair shou'd nevertheless, though they knew not
" what Clothes were, be asham'd to be seen un-
" cloth'd by one another, and by God himself." Our Author here resolves all the Shame Men find in their own Nakedness merely into Custom in Places where Clothes are worn. But whence is it then that this Shame has reach'd the most barbarous Nations? and that where they are naked every where else, yet they usually take care to cover those Parts by which the human Race is propagated? It is hard to account for this universal Sense of Shame in their own Nakedness, that has all along prevail'd amongst Mankind, those only excepted that have sunk into a Savageness little above the Brutes, if the human Nature were still in its Integrity and Innocence. The Scripture teaches us to look upon this Shame as an Effect of Sin, and a kind of constant Memorial of the Fall; which yields this noble Instruction, that it was Sin that brought Shame into the World, which has attended it ever since, and still remains a kind of tacit Acknowledgment of Man's Guilt, and argues a secret Consciousness of his own Impurity, that those Parts shou'd be thought most shameful by which the Pravity is convey'd, and the human Race propagated.

This Writer next objects, "that it is a strange
" Representation of God which is given, *Gen. 3.*
" 8. where we are told, that when they heard
" the Voice of God walking in the Garden in the
" Cool of the Evening, they hid themselves from
" his

“his Presence.” I suppose, this is to insinuate that *Moses* intended to represent the Deity as of human Shape, his Essence of such narrow Limits as to be circumscrib’d within the Walks of the Garden. But no Man that is acquainted with his Writings, and those just and sublime Ideas of the Deity which he so often expresses, and especially the noble Manner in which he had represented God just before, as creating the World by his Almighty Word, can possibly think this was his Sense. But supposing that God frequently manifested himself to Man in a State of Innocence in visible majestick Tokens of his glorious Presence, which our First Parents were well acquainted with, this leads us to an easy consistent Interpretation of this Passage, that by the Presence of the Lord in the Garden, from which they endeavour’d to hide themselves, we are to understand that extraordinary glorious Appearance, which they found by manifest Tokens was approaching towards them, *They heard the Voice of God*; that is, a Sound or Voice which they us’d to hear on such Occasions, when God was wont thus extraordinarily to manifest himself, tho’ probably now more terrible than usual. The walking here mention’d, may be either applied to the *Voice*, as some understand it, in which Sense *Moses* speaking of the Sound of the Trumpet at *Sinai*, saith, that it *walked*, for so the Word is in the Original, that is, it increased, and grew stronger and stronger, *Ex.* 19. 19. or if applied to the glorious Appearance, it signifies it’s approaching nearer and nearer. And their endeavouring to hide themselves from it, was a natural Expression of that Shame and Confusion that attends Guilt, and which often puts Men upon doing absurd Things.

The next Objection is, “that God himself, their
“ Fig-leave Aprons which they (having it seems
“ all

“ all Things necessary for sewing) sew’d together,
“ not being sufficient to hide their Shame, made
“ them Coats of the Skins of Beasts newly created
“ in Pairs.” There are two or three Objections
here insinuated. The first is a poor playing upon
the word *Sewing*. How cou’d our first Parents
sew, if they had neither Needle nor Thread? but
if the Word signifies to apply or fasten any way,
(as it manifestly does) this witty Conceit is quite
lost. *Ainsworth* gives a good Account of this Pas-
sage, *they fastned together by twisting and plat-
ting the Leaves and Twigs to gird about them*; for
the Word we render *Leaves* does also signify
Branches; and so we render it, *Neb. 8. 15.*

But “ God himself, made them Coats of the
“ Skins of Beasts newly created in Pairs.” I see
no Difficulty here, but what arises from the gross
Conceptions of the Author, who had his Head
filled with the Ideas of *sewing*, and *the Things ne-
cessary* to it, as Needle and Thread. But I sup-
pose it will easily be allow’d that God who had just
created Heaven and Earth, and had formed *Adam’s*
Body out of the Dust of the Ground, cou’d in a
Moment out of the Skins of Beasts provide warm
and beautiful Cloathing for our first Parents, with-
out going through the tedious Process of the Tay-
lor’s Art. How the Author came to know that
the Beasts were created in Pairs, as if there were
but two of a Sort, by which I suppose he insinu-
ates, that if any of ’em were then kill’d, the whole
Kind must be extinguish’d, I cannot tell; for this
is not so much as once hinted in the History of the
Creation recorded by *Moses*. But certainly this
Gentleman, who makes himself so merry with those
that scruple the eating the Blood of Animals, can-
not reasonably find fault that any Animals were
then slain for the use of Man, whether to furnish
him with Food or Cloathing. But I must own I
think

think their Account most probable, who suppose these were the Skins of Beasts slain for Sacrifice. Indeed this is not expressly mention'd in the short Account here given by *Moses*. But we find in the very next Chapter an Account of *Abel's* offering Sacrifices to God of the Firstlings of the Flock, and of God's accepting the Sacrifice; and we may justly suppose that *Abel* had this Rite from *Adam*, and he by the Appointment of God himself. And there is no Time so proper for it as immediately after the Fall, when we may suppose God appointed Beasts to be slain and offered to him in Sacrifice, both to remind our first Parents of the Death they had incurr'd, and to be a Pledge to them of his pardoning Mercy and Willingness to receive an Atonement for them. And his providing them decent Clothing out of the Skins of the Beasts that were just offered to him in Sacrifice, had a Tendency to strengthen the Faith, and raise the Hopes of the first human Pair. Whilst they wore these Clothes they carried about with them the visible Tokens and Pledges of the divine Goodness, that notwithstanding their Offence, God did not utterly cast them off, but exercis'd a fatherly Care towards them; and his thus clothing their Bodies was a Pledge to them, that he was much more ready to furnish and adorn their Minds, which by their Fall they had stripp'd of their Innocence and Purity, and was an Encouragement to them to apply to him for that purpose. I can see nothing in this Circumstance consider'd in this View, but what is worthy of God, and fit to be recorded by so wise an Historian as *Moses*. Our Author indeed gives a very different Account of the original of Sacrifices, p. 92. but I don't think we are oblig'd to pay any great Regard to it, tho' he himself seems very well pleas'd with it; and no wonder,

der, since it is his own Invention, and besides this bears hard upon the Priests.

His next Objection is a very extraordinary one. He desires *to be inform'd how Eve before her Eyes were open'd, saw that the Tree was good for Food.* As if *Moses* when he tells us, that the *Eyes of them both were opened* after eating the forbidden Fruit, [that is, that they were then too late sensible of what they had done, and saw and knew themselves to be guilty Creatures] intended to signify, that they were both in a literal Sense blind till that Time; tho' he had told us in the Words immediately preceding, that *Eve saw the Fruit that it was pleasant to the Eyes*; which is to suppose that *Moses* far from being a wise Lawgiver, as he was justly accounted in all Ages, had not common Sense. It wou'd be honouring such a Cavil too much to repeat it, if it did not serve to shew the Spirit of the Author, and give a true Sample of his critical Faculty.

We need not concern ourselves about the *Opbils*, mention'd by the Author; for I don't see what their Dotages are to us. But there is one Objection which he puts into their mouths, which I shall take some notice of because it is his own; for there is not the least mention of it in the Passages he refers to in *Irenæus* and *Tertullian* for an Account of the *Opbils*, viz. "That the Serpent foretold that *Adam*, tho' threatned with certain Death on the Day he eat the forbidden Fruit, shou'd not then die; who accordingly liv'd after that Sentence about 900 Years." I suppose this is to insinuate that according to *Moses's* Account, the Serpent did not deceive *Eve*, but told more Truth than God himself. But in order to this, he thinks proper to falsify the Text. He represents the Serpent as only saying *ye shall not then die*, whereas he says, *ye shall not surely die*; where

where he plainly insinuates, that they shou'd not die at all, they shou'd be immortal, and the Threatning shou'd never be executed. As to *Adam's* living so long after eating the forbidden Fruit, tho' it was threatned that he shou'd die in the Day he eat of it, this only proves that the Rigor of the Threatning was abated, tho' the Main of it was still preserv'd. Our first Parents that very Day forfeited the Privilege of Immortality, with which otherwise they shou'd have been invested, and from that Moment lay under the Sentence of Death, which was immediately pronounc'd upon them after their Sin, *Gen. 3. 19.* tho' it was not immediately executed in its full Rigor, but a long Reprieve granted; it being in the power of the supreme Lord to moderate the Rigor of the Threatning upon their Repentance. And yet it began to be executed in their being cast out of Paradise, and made subject to many Evils and Calamities, the Beginnings and Earnests of that Death, which was at length to be inflicted. And Death in Scripture is a Word of great Latitude, and includes all manner of Miseries and Calamities.

Our Author next in the Person of *B.* proposes it as the Opinion of Christians, that *it was the Devil in the Shape of a Serpent that tempted our first Parents*, p. 386 *. This is not very fairly represented. Some indeed have said, that it was the Devil in the shape of a Serpent that deceiv'd our first Parents; but the more common Opinion is, that it was a real Serpent possess'd and actuated by the Devil, and which he made use of as an Instrument. Our Author argues only against the former Opinion, which he imagin'd wou'd give him a greater Advantage, tho' his Arguments are far from being conclusive against it. But in this all Christians have generally agreed, that it is not to be interpreted

* P. 350.

terpreted merely of the Brute Serpent, but of *Satan* who was the principal Agent in the Temptation. This Writer indeed thinks proper to represent this as a novel Opinion. He observes, that “the Christians are now asham’d of the literal Interpretation of this Story; tho’ *St. Paul* was of another mind, who expressly says, *the Serpent deceiv’d Eve thro’ Subtilty.*” But that which he represents as a new Interpretation taken up by Constraint, has been the general Interpretation receiv’d, as far as appears, all along from the beginning, both in the Jewish and in the Christian Church. Thus the Author in the Book of Wisdom tells us, that *thro’ Envy of the Devil Death came into the World*, Ch. 2. 24. The *Targums* of *Ben Uzziel* and of *Jerusalem*, the *Talmuds* and ancient Jewish Writers interpret it of *Samael* the Angel of Death, whom they represent according to their Manner, as *riding upon the Serpent*, that is, possessing and actuating him. And, this *Maimonides* represents as the Tradition of their ancient Wise-men. See Testimonies collected to this purpose, in *Owen’s* first Volume on the *Hebrews*, p. 86, 87.

Our Author, indeed, wou’d have it that our Saviour understood it literally of the Brute Serpent, and alluded to this in that Precept, *be ye wise as Serpents; there being nothing done by any Serpent since the Fall, that cou’d occasion that Precept.* But it does not appear that in these Words he had any Reference at all to that Transaction, but rather to that Quickness of Sight, that Subtilty and Wariness in avoiding Dangers, which many Authors have remark’d in Serpents. The plain Meaning of the Precept seems to be no more than this, Be ye quick-sighted as Serpents, and like them wary and cautious to avoid Dangers. This Sense of the Words is most agreeable to his Design, which is

to recommend to his Disciples a prudent Caution and Circumspection in avoiding Dangers, at the same time that he recommends a Dove-like Simplicity and Innocence. But if this Writer will allow our Saviour to be a good Interpreter of *Moses*, it was the Devil that in or by the Serpent deceived *Eve*. For to what else can those Words of his refer, *John* 8. 44. where he saith of the Devil, that he was a *Murderer*, ἀνθρωποκτόνος, a *Man-slayer*, from the Beginning, and a *Liar* and the Father of Lyes? That this Phrase from the Beginning relates to what happen'd in the Beginning of the World soon after Man's Creation is evident, by comparing it with other Passages. Thus, *Matth.* 19. 4. our Saviour says to the Pharisees, *Have you not read that he which made them at the Beginning, made them Male and Female?* And to the same purpose, v. 8. *Moses because of the hardness of your Hearts suffer'd you to put away your Wives, but from the Beginning it was not so;* where he evidently refers to the original Institution of Marriage soon after Man's Creation, *Gen.* 2. 24. When therefore he tells the *Jews*, that *Satan* was a *Murderer* and a *Liar from the Beginning*, he plainly refers to the Account given by *Moses* of the Serpent, who in the Beginning deceiv'd our first Parents with Lyes, and by drawing them into Sin brought Death upon them. And he speaks of this as a Thing well known and understood by the *Jews*.

Many other Passages of the New Testament plainly lead us to the same Interpretation. It is for this reason that in the Book of the *Revelation* we read of that *Old Serpent call'd the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole World*, *Rev.* 12. 9, 14, 15. 20. 2, 10. And when we are told, *John* 3. 8. that for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil; or, as it is express'd v. 5. that he might take away

away our Sins; and *Hebr. 2. 14.* that *Christ took Part of our Flesh and Blood, that he might thro' Death destroy him that had the Power of Death, that is the Devil*; these Passages plainly suppose, that it was the Devil that brought Sin and Death into the World, whose Power the Messiah was to destroy, according to the original Promise. And the Apostle *Paul*, when he saith, *Rom. 16. 20.* *The God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*, seems manifestly to allude to that Promise, that *the Seed of the Woman shou'd bruise the Serpent's Head*. Nor can it be concluded (as this Writer insinuates) from his saying, that *the Serpent beguil'd Eve*, that therefore he understood it merely of the brute Serpent, and not of *Satan* at all. I fear (says the Apostle) *lest as the Serpent beguil'd Eve through his Subtilty, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity that is in Christ, 2 Cor. 11. 3.* By whom was he afraid their Minds shou'd be corrupted? By the false Apostles, whom *v. 15.* he calls *the Ministers of Satan*. So that if we suppose the Serpent to be the Instrument of *Satan*, made use of and actuated by him for that purpose, it best answers the Apostle's Design, and makes the Comparison more just and proper. *Irenæus* makes use of the same Comparison with the Apostle *Paul*, "That the Serpent seduc'd *Eve*, promising her that which he himself had not, *lib. 4. p. 275. Grabe's Edit.* But he that wou'd infer from thence, that therefore *Irenæus* understood it merely of the brute Serpent, and not of *Satan* at all, wou'd give a very wrong Account of his Sense; since the contrary is evident from a Number of Passages in that Author. And indeed the Fathers that often differ in other Interpretations, all agree unanimously in this, that none of them suppose it to be a mere brute Serpent and no more. Nor did any of the Hereticks that we

can find, suppose this; though some of them, particularly the *Opbitæ*, had odd Conceits on this Subject. So that what this Gentleman represents as an Opinion lately taken up by Christians through Shame, is the ancient Interpretation of this Passage that was receiv'd in the Jewish Church, and was the Sense of our Saviour himself and of the sacred Writers of the New Testament, and which universally obtain'd among all Christians from the first Times of Christianity, and therefore may well be regarded as the true Interpretation, and as containing a just Account of the Sense and Design of *Moses*.

Nor are the Author's Objections of sufficient Weight, by which he pretends to shew, that the brute Serpent only, and not the Devil at all, was intended in this History of the Fall. He asks, whether it was *the Devil* who is said to be more *subtil than any Beast of the Field*? or whether the Curse denounc'd on the Serpent of *going on his Belly, and eating Dust all the Days of his Life*, can agree to an immaterial immortal Being? and whether the Text affords the least Argument to imagine, that God did not as much speak to the Serpent, as to Adam and Eve?

Those that maintain (which is the common Opinion) that a real Serpent was made use of by *Satan*, will easily grant, that *God as much spoke to the Serpent as to Adam and Eve*; but then it was to the Serpent as actuated by *Satan*, or to *Satan* as actuating the Serpent. Taking it in this Light, what is said of the Subtilty of the Serpent, may be so design'd to signify the natural Sagacity of the brute Creature, as under that chiefly to insinuate the Subtilty of *Satan* the principal Agent. And in pronouncing the Sentence upon the Serpent, God so condemn'd the Serpent which was the Instrument, as in that Sentence to involve the Principal, declaring

claring him vile and accursed above all other Beings. If the Expressions here us'd be such as belong literally to Serpents, it is not to be wonder'd at, when it was a real Serpent that *Satan* made use of as his Instrument in carrying on the Temptation. In the Serpent he tempted, and in the Serpent he was condemn'd. And as he had for vile Purposes degraded himself so low as to enter into and possess a Brute-Creature, God address'd the Sentence to him as in the Brute, and in Terms accommodated to the Nature and Condition of the Creature which he actuated and assum'd, but which *Satan*, well enough knew were principally intended against him; and I doubt not our first Parents soon knew it too.

Those who suppose there was no real Serpent made use of at all in this Transaction, but *Satan* only in the shape of a Serpent, which is the Opinion this Writer sets himself to combat, will also find it no hard matter to answer his Objections. They may suppose that as *Satan* took upon him the Form or Appearance of a Serpent, the better to carry on his Design, so he is spoken of all along according to the Appearance he assum'd. And it is not unusual either in Scripture or other Writings, to call Things what they outwardly appear to be; as the Angels are called Men when appearing in a human Form, *Gen.* 18. 2. 19. 10. They may suppose that the Account of the Serpent's Subtilty, with which this Story is introduc'd, is design'd to prepare the Mind of the Reader, by intimating that this Serpent here spoken of was not a common Beast, but one in that Appearance far more subtil than any of those Animals. Nor wou'd the sacred Historian honour him so far as to describe him by a higher Character than that of the Brute under whose Form he appear'd. And in pronouncing the Curse upon him, God does not vouchsafe to

give him a higher Title than that of the Serpent ; but condemns him in a degrading manner, in Terms suited to the Condition of the Creature whom he resembled, and whose Form he took ; and which were very expressive of the Ignominy pour'd upon him, and the vile accursed State to which he was adjudg'd.

For my part, I own that either of these Interpretations seems infinitely more probable than that of the Author, who is for understanding this whole Passage merely of the brute Serpent ; and thinks that all that is intended by the Promise, that *the Woman's Seed shou'd bruise the Serpent's Head*, and that *the Serpent shou'd bruise his Heel*, is only to signify that sometimes Men shou'd tread upon Serpents, and the Serpents shou'd bite their Heels, which he observes is *very usual in hot Countries, where Serpents are numerous, and Men's Heels bare*. I can never think that so wise a Man as *Moses* certainly was, wou'd have given so particular an Account of this in his short Narrative of what happen'd soon after the Creation, or have introduc'd God himself pronouncing a Sentence with so great Solemnity, if this was all that was intended by it. But supposing that it was an evil Spirit that actuated the Serpent, or appear'd in the form of one, and conducted the whole Affair, a good Account may be given of it. 'Tis plain that the Scripture all along supposes evil Spirits, and one particularly at their Head, engag'd in a perpetual Enmity against Mankind ; 'tis also evident from Scripture, that there was a glorious Deliverer promis'd and expected all along, in whom all the Families of the Earth were to be blessed, and who was to be the Salvation of God unto the Ends of the Earth. And if we suppose that evil Spirit to be here intended as the Cause of the Revolt of our first Parents ; and that the glorious Deliverer, who was afterwards

afterwards more fully reveal'd, was here promis'd as one that shou'd proceed from the Woman, and break and destroy *Satan's* usurped Power; this renders all consistent, and yields a noble Sense fit to be recorded by so wise an Historian as *Moses*; and which is every way most agreeable to Scripture, and to that ancient Interpretation of this Passage which was receiv'd from the Beginning.

Our Author indeed cannot think that when it is said there shou'd be Enmity between the Woman's Seed and the Seed of the Serpent, that this can relate to *Satan* at all, who *has no Seed but metaphorical Seed*; which, since the Woman's Seed is taken literally, wou'd be immediately changing the Meaning of the word *Seed*. But it is manifest that in the Language of Scripture *Seed* is often put for Children, and those are often said to be the Children of a Person that imitate and follow him, and whose Head and Leader he is; nor is there any Absurdity in supposing that the word *Seed* is here accommodated to the different Subjects spoken of. Many Instances of this kind may be produc'd both in Scripture and other Writings, where the same Word is taken in the same Passage in a different Sense, and varied according to the different Subjects to which it is applied.

He further asks, "If a Book be interpreted thus, especially in relation to historical Facts, how can we be sure of its Meaning in any one Place?" Very easily. The Interpretation is what naturally arises from the Circumstances of the whole Story as there related, and what best answers and accounts for it. The Story itself is literally related barely as it happen'd, and was outwardly transacted. Whether it was a real Serpent actuated by *Satan*, or *Satan* alone under the form of a Serpent, that tempted our first Parents, yet still it was one that appear'd as a Serpent, and *Moses*

calls him what he appear'd to be, leaving the Reader to conclude as it was natural to do, that there was an invisible Power engag'd. And indeed there are many Things that lead us to conclude, that both the Knowledge of an evil Spirit the great Enemy and Tempter of Mankind, and of a glorious Deliverer to be sent in due Time, was transmitted from the Beginning.

The Author goes on to ask, *Why the whole Race of Serpents shou'd be curs'd for the Crime of a fallen Angel?* And observes, *that if Serpents had at first been form'd as at present, they cou'd not creep otherwise than they do.* This Objection is very impertinent, when urg'd as it is here by the Author, against those who suppose that there was no real Serpent employ'd at all, but only *Satan* in the Shape or Appearance of a Serpent, which is the Opinion he undertakes to oppose; for then the Curse is not against the brute Serpent at all, but only against *Satan* under that Form. And even if there was a real Serpent made use of, yet still it may be suppos'd that the Curse was only and properly directed and design'd against *Satan*, who actuated that Creature, though couch'd in Terms accommodated to the Condition of the Creature he actuated and assum'd. And in this View the Objection is lost. But if we suppose not only that there was a real Serpent made use of by *Satan*, but that a Curse was pronounc'd upon the brute Creature the Instrument, as well as upon *Satan* the principal Agent in the Temptation; I can see nothing in this that can be prov'd to be absurd or unworthy of God. By the Law of *Moses* even brute Creatures were sometimes to be put to death, that had been made use of in perpetrating abominable Crimes, *Lev. 20. 15, 16. Ex. 21. 28, 29.* And this was wisely and justly order'd to beget in Men a deeper Sense of the Atrociousness of the Crime,

Crime, when even the brute Creature that had been the Instrument in it suffer'd. And if ever any thing of this kind was proper, it seem'd to be so in the present Case, at the first Entrance of Sin into the World. Since Man, the Lord of this lower Creation, suffer'd so much for hearkening to the Temptation, it was fit the brute Creature that had been the Instrument in it should suffer too. If therefore it be supposed that the Serpent, or at least that kind of Serpent that was made use of in the Temptation, was originally a nobler Creature than now, and that it suffer'd some debasing Change, the more effectually to signalize God's Displeasure against Sin, and to be a visible Pledge to our first Parents of the greater Punishment that should be inflicted on *Satan* the principal Agent; I believe this Writer would find it hard to prove the Absurdity of such a Supposition; since the doing it for such Ends as these, was of much greater consequence than merely to preserve the Serpent in its original Beauty. If it was no way inconsistent with the divine Wisdom and Goodness to have made Serpents at first exactly in all respects as they are now, what Injustice was there if for a very valuable End he made them so afterwards, which he could easily at once by Willing effect? And if the Effect of this Change extended to the succeeding Race of Serpents, this would not, properly speaking, be any more a Misery or Punishment to them, than if God had at first made them such in all respects as they are at present, as our Author certainly believes he did.

But he asks further in the Person of *B.* the pretended Christian, "Why all other Animals should
" bring forth in Pain for the Fault of *Eve*? For
" had Nature form'd all Females at first, as they
" have been ever since *Eve* eat the forbidden Fruit,
" none of them, except by Miracle, could be de-
" livered

“livered without Pain.” It does not appear; but that as other Animals would have died tho’ *Adam* had not fallen, so they would have had Pain and Sickness too; and why not Pain in bringing forth? nor is there any thing in the sacred History to the contrary. It is indeed denounced as a Punishment to *Eve* for her Transgressions, *I will greatly multiply thy Sorrow and thy Conception; in Sorrow shalt thou bring forth Children*, Gen. 3. 16. From which all that can be gather’d is this, that as a Consequence of her Sin, she should breed and bring forth Children with much greater Pain and Hazard and Difficulty than otherwise she would have done. And what is there in this, but what may easily be supposed? since the Females of other Animals generally breed and bring forth their Young with less Sickness, and Trouble, and Danger, than Women, (as *Aristotle* long ago observed) which it is not probable was the original Constitution; and since among Women, some, and even whole Nations, are observed to do this with greater Ease and less Hazard than others, though there be no essential Difference between them and others; I don’t see why it may not be supposed, that without imagining any essential Difference in the Constitution of the human Nature, if Man had not fallen, all Women would have bred and brought forth Children with far greater Ease and Safety than any one Woman does now.

The Author mentions it also as very hard, that *after the Fact was committed*, [viz. the Sin of our first Parents] *God should revenge it on all their innocent Posterity for ever, by cursing the Ground, &c.* p. 388 *. But does not this Writer himself, who supposes all *Adam’s* Posterity innocent, yet suppose them liable to the Inconveniences *Moses* mentions, Barrenness of the Earth, Sorrow and hard Labour, hazardous

* P. 351.

hazardous Sickness, and Pain in Pregnancy and in Child-bearing, and lastly to many Diseases, and to Death itself? I know no difference therefore between the Author's Scheme and that of *Moses*, but this: Both agree in Matter of Fact, which cannot be denied, that Mankind are now subject to these Inconveniences, for such they manifestly are; but *Moses* informs us, that it was Sin that first brought them upon Mankind, whereas the Author supposes them to arise from the original Constitution of things, and that it would not have been otherwise if Man had not sinned; so that these Inconveniences were brought upon Mankind without any Fault at all either of them or their first Parents. Now if we compare the two Schemes, it is easy to see which of them gives the greater Idea of the divine Justice and Goodness, and which of them, if believed, must have a better Effect on Mankind. Does it not give us a higher Notion of the Goodness of God, to suppose the human Nature not to have been originally made subject to those Evils and Inconveniences, and that Man did not feel them till by his own Sin and voluntary Defection from God he brought them upon himself? and does it not at the same time tend to beget in us a deep Sense of the Evil and Malignity of Sin, to consider the sad Change it wrought in the face of things? that on the Enterance of Sin into the World, Man was made subject to a Variety of Evils and Troubles, to Diseases and Death; the Woman's Sorrows were multiplied in breeding and bringing forth Children; and even the Earth itself, Man's Habitation, render'd less fruitful, less delightful and salubrious than before. And such a Change might be made both in Man and in the Earth without destroying the Nature or essential Constitution either of the one or the other. It certainly answers many valuable Ends to consider these things as the penal Effects

Effects of Sin. In this View they serve as constant Memorials of the Fall, and as so many standing Warnings and Admonitions to Mankind of God's Displeasure against Sin, and of the Evils it has brought upon our Natures.

Our Author having done what he could to prove that it was merely a brute Serpent that is intended in the History of the Fall, as tempting our first Parents, next urges, that "the matter is not a jot mended, by substituting a Devil instead of a Serpent. He can't see how an infinitely good God could permit a most malicious cunning Spirit to work on the Weakness of a Woman, just placed in a new World, without interposing in this unequal Conflict, or giving notice of any such wicked Spirit; Angels, neither good or bad, being mention'd in the History of the Creation."

Indeed if our first Parents were so very silly as our Author supposes them to be, rude and ignorant as the most barbarous of the human Race, there might be some Weight in the Objection; but supposing (which I have shewn to be the Case) that they were created in such a State of Maturity and Perfection, as to be every way able to resist the Temptation, there is nothing inconsistent with the divine Wisdom and Goodness in suffering them to be thus tempted. Why should God interpose in an extraordinary way to restrain that evil Spirit, when he had endued our first Parents with sufficient Ability to resist him, so that they could not be overcome by him but by their own Fault? But he thinks, "God should have given notice of such a wicked Spirit." And how does he know but he did? It does not prove that he did not, because *Angels, neither good nor bad, are mention'd in the History of the Creation.* For no-body ever pretended that the short History *Moses* gives of the Creation,

Creation, and of Man's first Estate in Paradise; or of his Fall, is a full Account of every thing that was said or done on that Occasion. But why was it necessary that God should give notice of such a wicked Spirit? Was it not sufficient that God gave our first Parents a plain and express Command, and let them know, that on no Pretence whatsoever they were to violate it? What needed a more particular Caution, especially to innocent Creatures, that were sensible they owed their Being, and all the Benefits they enjoy'd to his Goodness, and that to him as their supreme Lord they owed the most absolute Obedience, and ought therefore not to hearken to any Suggestions of any Person whatsoever to the contrary?

But he proceeds to urge, that " what seems most unaccountable is, that God should continue to suffer this subtle and malignant Spirit to range about deceiving and circumventing Mankind; who having a Capacity vastly superior to them, is continually sowing the Seeds of Mischief, and scattering the Poison of universal Discord, making use of those very Men as his Instruments, whose professed Business it is, to promote universal Concord." And then he introduces the poor *Indians* as saying to the Missionaries, " Is not your God a good God, and loves Mankind? Why does he then permit this Devil to be continually doing them such infinite hurt? Why is he not put under Confinement, if not deprived of a Being, of which he has made himself unworthy?"

This is design'd not merely to expose the History of the Fall, but to expose the whole Scripture-Revelation, the New Testament as well as the Old, which frequently represents *Satan* as a subtil and malicious Spirit, employ'd in tempting and doing mischief to Mankind. And that there are such
evil

evil Spirits, has been the general Opinion of almost all Nations in all Ages. There have been from time to time several Facts so well attested, that the best and wisest Men in all Ages have believed them, which carry evident Marks of the Agency and Interposition of invisible Beings, and some of them hurtful and malevolent to Mankind. And this Writer himself elsewhere not only supposes evil Beings, but that God may permit them to work signal Miracles for seducing Mankind, though here he thinks it inconsistent with the divine Goodness to suffer any such evil Beings at all. As to the Questions he proposes in the Name of the *Indians*, 'tis possible he thinks them very acute and subtle ones. And another, with as much Pretence to Reason, might ask, If God be good and a lover of Mankind, why did he suffer Sin to enter into the World? why does he suffer the strong so often to oppress the weak, and Innocence to become a Prey to Subtlety and Fraud? Such Questions discover nothing but a pert Ignorance, and a bold arraigning divine Providence. There may be many wise Reasons for continuing *Satan* in being and not absolutely confining him, though this Gentleman does not know them. What are the Laws of the invisible World of Spirits, how they are govern'd, and what their Agency and Influence is in the Affairs of Men, how far they are permitted to work, and in what Limits restrain'd, are things we are at present very little acquainted with. May not, for aught we know, much of the Wisdom and Beauty of Providence appear in God's Procedure towards the evil Angels, in his suffering them to act according to their Natures, and yet restraining and governing their Malice, in bringing a greater Good out of their Evil, and taking occasion from their Malice and Wickedness, to render his own Wisdom and Glory more illustrious? May not

not he spare them at present, as he often spares wicked Men, and powerful Oppressors, for the wise and righteous Ends of his Providence, reserving them for a greater Punishment when their Iniquities shall be full?

It must be further considered, that the same Scripture that represents evil Spirits as tempting Men and doing mischief, does also assure us, that there are great numbers of good Angels, Spirits that excel in Wisdom and Strength, and of great Benevolence to Mankind, who are ever ready to do us good, and minister to us in a thousand kind Offices; that God himself controuls those evil Beings, and restrains and governs their Malice and Power; that he will not *suffer* us to be *tempted above what we are able to bear*, nor will *Satan* be permitted to hurt us except we willingly yield our selves to be led captive by him; that if we *resist the Devil*, *he will flee from us*; and finally, that God is ready to assist us by his Spirit, so that we may be sure of obtaining a glorious Conquest over *Satan* and all the Powers of Darknes, if we be not wanting to our selves. And taking all this together, there is nothing in this whole Scheme inconsistent with the divine Wisdom and Goodness.

Indeed when we hear of such subtle and malignant Beings engaged against us, this tends to give us a more lively and thankful Sense of God's infinite Goodness and Care in protecting us from their Malice; it engages us to a closer Adherence to him, and a more constant Dependence on him; it renders us more cautious and vigilant over our own Conduct; it exercises the Power, the Wisdom and Benevolence of good Angels in assisting us, and defeating the Malice of those evil Beings; and finally it gives us a noble Idea of the Fortitude of a good Man, and renders his Virtue and Constancy more illustrious, when we consider his Life as a
glorious

glorious Struggle with evil Angels as well as wicked Men, whom he is enabled by the divine Assistance, and by the proper Exercise of his own Virtues, to overcome.

As to the last thing the Author adds in the Person of the *Indians* to shew, that if God be good he cannot permit the Devil to do mischief, *viz.* That *with us one who does not hinder a Mischief when it is in his power, is thought not much better than he who does it*; I don't see what view this can have but the subverting all Religion, and introducing downright Atheism. At this rate God must be directly charged with all the Sin and Mischief in the World, because he does not hinder it, though absolutely speaking it is in his power to do so; and it must be said, that when he permits Robbers and Murderers and Tyrants to oppress and destroy their Fellow-Creatures, he is as bad as they. If this Gentleman believes a good God and a Providence, he is as much concern'd to answer these Objections as we are. But either he has very narrow Views, and provided he can offer something that seems to bear hard upon the Scripture-Revelation, never considers whether it does not equally militate against natural Religion too; or else it must be said, that notwithstanding all his mighty Pretences of Zeal for pure natural Religion, and for the Honour of God, he has at the bottom no real Concern for it at all; but rather than admit Revelation, is willing to give up all Religion and Regard to the Deity.

Thus have I particularly consider'd what the Author offers against the Scripture-Account of Man's original Dignity, and the Fall. I would conclude this Subject with one Remark, That as it is highly rational to suppose, that the human Nature was made at first more perfect than now it is, and that it is fallen from its original State into a State

State of great Degeneracy and Corruption, so the particular Account of it given by *Moses* deserves great Regard, and ought not to be rashly rejected, even though there were some Difficulties attending it, which we are not well able to explain. It ought to be consider'd, that the Account he gives is very short, and touches only at the principal things, omitting many Circumstances, which if known, would greatly tend to clear it. The divine Wisdom has not thought fit to gratify our Curiosity, but has contented itself with giving us to know in general, that Man was at first made upright in a holy and happy State; that he fell from that State by transgressing an easy Command; that he did this at the Instigation of the Tempter; that this brought Death and Misery and Corruption upon Mankind; that yet it pleased God to grant a gracious Promise to our first Parents, relating to a glorious Deliverer, whom he would send to rescue Mankind from the Ruins brought upon them by their Apostacy. This is what was necessary for us to know, and is afterwards more largely and fully explain'd in other parts of the sacred Writings.

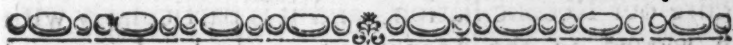
This Account of *Moses* is venerable for its Antiquity, as written by a very wise Man and celebrated Lawgiver, who undoubtedly had it by ancient Tradition which he thought he might depend upon. And many have shewn that there were some remarkable Traces of this Tradition to be found amongst the Heathens. But it carries it further, when we consider that *Moses* who writ this was a Prophet of God, raised and inspired by God himself in an extraordinary manner, and his divine Mission confirm'd by the most astonishing and glorious Miracles, which all come in aid of the Accounts he gives, and derive a wonderful Credit to them. Add to all this the Testimony of our blessed Saviour himself, who all along supposes and

confirms the Authority of *Moses* and the Prophets, and particularly refers, as I have shewn, to the Account he gives of the Fall of Man, through the Malice and Subtlety of *Satan*; which is also evidently supposed and referred to in several other Passages of the New Testament; and then all the illustrious Attestations given to our Saviour and to his Apostles do also confirm the Authority of *Moses*, and the Truth and Certainty of what he delivers to the Church. And whether all this be not of far greater Weight to support the Account he gives, than our Author's Objections are against it, may be left to any impartial Man to consider.

I shall on this Occasion just take notice of some other things mentioned by the Author to shew the Ignorance of the Writer of the Book of *Genesis*, p. 254 *. He thinks it appears from the Account there given of the Confusion of Languages, that *he did not know the reason of the necessary Variety of Language upon the Increase of Mankind*. But if there was at first but one universal Language, which is very probable, it will be hard to account for the vast Difference of Languages in the World merely from the Increase of Mankind; since the Changes that have happen'd to Languages in Process of Years, have been chiefly owing to foreign Mixtures of one Language with another; and we find in Fact, that where Nations have been kept pure and unmix'd, without much Intercourse with other Nations of a different Language, they have retain'd their original Language without any considerable Variations, for a long Succession of Ages. I can't see therefore the Absurdity of supposing an extraordinary Interposition of divine Providence in dividing Men's Languages. And the Account *Moses* gives of the Dispersion that follow'd upon it, and the Original of the several Families and Nations that replenish'd

replenish'd the Earth, furnishes a signal Proof both of the great Knowledge and Antiquity of the Writer, as many have shewn, particularly the learned Bochart in his *Pbaleg*.

As to what the Author there adds, that *perhaps the not knowing the natural Cause of the Rainbow, occasion'd that Account we have in Genesis of its Institution*: Not to urge, that the Author would perhaps find it hard to prove that there must necessarily have been a Rainbow before the Flood as well as since; all that can be gather'd from *Moses's* Account is, that God set or appointed his Bow in the Cloud to be a Mark or Token of his Covenant; that he would not destroy the Earth by a Flood any more. And I don't see any reason why God may not make use of Things already existent, and appoint them to be the Signs and Tokens of his Covenant, as well as of Things that had no Existence before, but first began to be upon that Occasion. And there seems to be a particular Propriety in this Sign, that as often as Men behold that beautiful and glorious Phænomenon, that naturally attracts the Regards of Mankind, and which appears in a rainy or watry Cloud, they may be put in mind of the divine Goodness and Promise.



C H A P. XV.

*The Christian Doctrine of the Mediator
vindicated.*

AS the Scriptures represent the human Nature to be in a very corrupt and degenerate State, a State of Sin and Misery, so we are there taught, that God has in his infinite Wisdom and Love sent

his own Son to save and to redeem us. This was more obscurely signified under the Old Testament. There is an admirable Series of Prophecies deliver'd at sundry times and in divers manners, by Persons that lived in different Ages, at a vast distance of time from one another, all pointing to a wonderful Person that was to appear as the Saviour of Mankind; some describing him by one Circumstance of his Coming and Character, and some by another, all admirably verified in the Event. The New Testament exhibits an account of the actual Appearance of this wonderful Person, in whom the Prophecies were fulfilled, and to whom the most illustrious Attestations were given. We are there instructed to regard him as sent to redeem and recover our lapsed Nature, and as appointed to be the only Mediator between God and Man.

There are two Things remarkable in the Gospel-Scheme of Salvation. The one is, that God is represented as transacting with Mankind through the Intervention of his own Son as Mediator, through whom the most valuable Blessings and Graces are communicated from God to us, and through whom we have Access to God, and in whose Name we are to offer up all our Prayers. The other is, that this Mediator was to suffer and die for us to procure our Reconciliation, and it is particularly with a regard to the Atonement made by him, and offered up on our Behalf, that penitent Sinners are pardoned and accepted, and have a Right given them to eternal Life.

As to the general Appointment of a Mediator between the offended Majesty of Heaven and sinful Mankind, there is nothing in this Constitution but what is highly agreeable to our Condition and Circumstances, as we are guilty Creatures. It is certain that among Men, let a Parent, or Master, or Prince, be ever so mercifully disposed, it is often
thought

thought necessary to keep an offending Child, or Servant, or Subject, at a distance, and not to transact with him or restore him to Favour directly and immediately, but by the Intervention of another Person; that so he may be the better brought to a due Sense of his Offence, and to an Awe of the Authority he had violated; and may not think Reconciliation too easily obtain'd, and so be encouraged to venture on new Acts of Disobedience. All the World sees the Reasonableness and Propriety of such a Conduct in many cases among Men, and no Reason can be offer'd, why, allowing for the infinite Difference there is between God and Man, there may not be something correspondent or analogous to this in the divine Government. Since it should be more guarded against in this than in any other case, that Men should not think it a slight and common Evil to sin against God; nor look upon Reconciliation with him as too cheap and easy a thing; or think his Favour after heinous Offences too lightly and easily obtain'd.

There are two valuable Ends which this Appointment of a Mediator seems especially design'd to answer. The one is, that it tends to preserve in our Minds a deep Sense of our own Unworthiness, and of the infinite Purity, Justice and awful Majesty of God; in that the appointed way of Access for guilty Creatures to God, is through a Mediator of infinite Dignity, and by virtue of a most valuable Atonement of a singular Nature offered by him in our stead. The other is, that it tends to calm and dispel our guilty Fears, and to strengthen our Hope and Affiance in the divine Mercy. A Sense of our own Guilt (which is naturally a very jealous thing) and of God's infinite Purity and awful Glory, might be apt to keep us at a distance, and discourage our Applications to him; but when we come to know that he himself hath in his in-

finite Mercy, appointed a Mediator for us, even his own Son, who that he might be the better fitted for carrying on the important Work, hath taken upon him our Nature, and hath also submitted to the most grievous Sufferings as the Punishment of our Offences; this encourages our Hope and Trust, and gives us the strongest Assurances of God's kind Intentions towards us, and his Willingness to be reconcil'd.

Indeed as to the Propriety and Reasonableness of this Order in general, of making use of a Mediator in our Approaches to the Deity, through whom our Prayers are to ascend to God, and his Benefits to be conferred upon us, we have the Consent of the best of the Heathen Philosophers, and almost of all Mankind; so that it may almost pass for an universal Notion or Principle. This must either be ascrib'd to a primitive Tradition derived from the patriarchal Times, and originally founded in the Promise of a Saviour made to *Adam*, and afterwards renewed to several of the Patriarchs, (though this Tradition, like many other important Truths and Principles, was afterwards disguised in Fables, and corrupted with many impure Mixtures;) or else it had its Foundation in Men's own natural Notions, and in the Consciousness they had of their own Guilt, and their Unfitness to approach immediately to that holy and glorious Being whom they had offended by their Sins.

Our Author indeed, in the beginning of his 8th Chapter, takes a great deal of pains to shew the Absurdity of the Heathen Notion of mediatory Gods, and it is very probable he designs it against the Notion of a Mediator in general. I have already observed, that a Heathen Philosopher, a *Platonist* for instance, would find it no very hard matter to answer the Arguments he brings, though he himself seems to have a very good Opinion of them;

them; see the first Part of this Answer, p. 246. to which I refer the Reader. And to what is there offered, I only add, that whereas he urges, that “their addressing to mediatory Beings, to shew
“their greater Respect to the supreme Being, and
“their own Unworthiness to approach him, shews
“what unworthy Notions they entertain’d of God;
“since it would be an Affront even to a temporal
“Prince if he was present, and heard every thing
“you said, not to address to him but to another,
“to let the Prince know what you wanted of
“him,” p. 86. This Argument would equally prove, that we ought never to desire any earthly Friend to pray for us, because God is then present; yea, it would prove that we ought never to ask any Favour or Benefit of any Man whatsoever, because we are then in the Presence of God, and according to this Author, it is an Affront to ask another in his Presence, for what must primarily come from his Goodness, as all our Benefits do. It would prove, that we are never to thank any earthly Benefactors for any Kindness done us, or any Benefit conferred upon us, because this would be to thank them in God’s Presence, for what we receive primarily from him. But supposing that the addressing our selves to God by a Mediator is most respectful to his supreme Majesty, and is agreeable to his Wisdom as manifesting a Sense of his infinite Greatness and Purity, and of our own Vileness and Unworthiness, especially if we suppose that this is the Method he himself hath appointed, it is no Affront to God to do it in his Presence; it is only observing the Order which is agreeable to him, or which he hath prescrib’d.

I own indeed, that the Notions the Heathens had of their mediatory Gods, proved a plentiful Source of Superstition and Idolatry; and that they lost the Worship of the true God amidst a Multi-

plicity of inferior Deities. But Christianity affords an effectual Antidote against this ; which I am persuaded the Author's Arguments, as he manages them, would never do. We are there taught, that as there is but one God, so there is but one Mediator between God and Man, so that we are not now distracted with a Multiplicity of Mediators. And I think it can scarce be denied, even by those that do not pay any Regard to the Scripture-Revelation, that supposing a Mediator at all, there cannot be a more noble Idea of one than that which is set before us in the Gospel ; whether we consider the glorious Dignity of his Person as there describ'd, or the Offices ascrib'd to him, which are such as are admirably fitted to the Necessities of Mankind, and to the important Work of recovering our lapsed Natures to the Favour and Image and Enjoyment of the Deity.

I think it is evident, that the higher the Dignity of the Mediator is, the better is he fitted to answer all the Ends for which we can suppose such a Mediator appointed ; and supposing him to be one in whom the divine and the human Nature is wonderfully united, this tends greatly to strengthen our Faith and Confidence, and he appears upon such a View to be every way qualified for the important Work to which he is design'd. Nor is our not being able distinctly to explain the Manner of this Union, any real Objection against it. For how many things are there relating to the Nature of God, his Attributes and Works, which we are not able to explain ? Can we explain how our own Souls and Bodies are united, or how a spiritual Being that has no Parts or Solidity, should move Matter, or be united to it ? But must we therefore deny that it is so ? It will be easily granted this Author, that an *infinite* Being cannot become *finite*, that an *omnipresent* Being cannot be
limited

limited or confin'd (as he represents it) to a small Spot of Earth, nor can an invisible Essence become visible or the proper Object of our Senses, nor can God be converted into Man, or the divine Nature changed into the human. These are Contradictions; but no way chargeable on the sacred Writings, which never teach us to form such Notions. But though an infinite, omnipresent, invisible Essence cannot be converted into a finite, limited, visible Nature, yet how far it may assume such a finite Nature into a near Union with itself, we cannot pretend to explain. And those that represent this as impossible, ought to prove that there is a Contradiction in it, which hitherto they have not been able to do. The Incarnation of the Son of God is indeed a great Mystery (and Mysteries there must be in natural Religion as well as revealed *) but it is a Mystery of Love, and Grace, and Condescension, which, where it is firmly believed, must have the noblest Effects upon the Heart and Practice, and cannot but fill the Soul with the highest Admiration and Love and Joy. It is impossible to represent God under a more amiable Idea, or to conceive a higher Notion of his amazing Love and Goodness towards Mankind, than to consider him as having so loved the World, that he sent his only begotten Son to assume our Nature, to bring a perfect Revelation of the divine Will to Mankind, to set before us an excellent Example of universal Goodness and Purity and Humility, to redeem us by his own grievous Sufferings from deserved Wrath and Ruin, to give us a visible Pledge of a glorious Immortality by his own Resurrection and Ascension, to be a perpetual Advocate and Intercessor for us, through whom we have full Liberty of Access to God as our heavenly Father, and to communicate to us the Influences and Aids of his holy Spirit,

* See the Appendix to the first Part of this Answer.

Spirit, that we may be train'd up in a Life of sincere Obedience, and the Practice of every amiable Virtue, for a Life of eternal Glory. I think it cannot reasonably be denied, even by those that give no Credit to these Things, that where they are firmly believ'd they tend to kindle in the Heart warm and lively Sentiments of Love and Gratitude, and to fill the Soul with Joy and Comfort, and powerfully draw it to God, whom it cannot but regard as infinite Love and Goodness.

There is therefore no Danger in this Case of what the Author objects against the Heathen Notion of mediatory Gods, that a Regard to the Mediator, according to the Scripture-Notion of it, shou'd lessen our Love and Regard to the Supreme. There might be some Pretence for this, if it were alledg'd that God had of himself no Inclinations to shew Mercy to us, no kind Intentions towards us, but was merely prevail'd on by the Sollicitations of the Mediator to pardon and receive us, contrary to his own Inclinations and Design: but this is not the Notion the Gospel gives us. On the contrary, we are there taught, that it was because in his most free and rich Grace and Goodness he design'd to shew Mercy to the human Race, that he sent his Son and appointed him to be Mediator, and to take upon him our Nature. The Scripture teaches us constantly to rise in our Thoughts and Affections through Christ this one Mediator to the Father, and to regard the whole Scheme of our Salvation as proceeding from his incomprehensible and unparallel'd Wisdom and Love. So that it may be justly said, that our Love to the Father and our Admiration of his Goodness, will rise in proportion to the Love and Esteem we have for Christ the Mediator.

And as the Scriptures give us the most glorious Account of the divine Dignity of the Mediator whom

whom God hath provided for us, so we are there taught that this Mediator, by his own Consent and the Father's Appointment, *suffer'd for our Sins, the Just for the Unjust, that he might bring us unto God.* It pleas'd God, for the more effectual declaring his Justice and vindicating the Authority of his Government and Laws, to appoint that his own Son when assuming our Nature, and invested with the Character of Mediator, in order to redeem us, should submit to the most grievous Sufferings in our Nature and stead. And nothing can possibly have a greater Tendency to fill and impress our Minds with the most awful Thoughts of God's infinite Justice and Detestation against Sin, and with the profoundest Reverence of his Authority and Government, than to behold the Son of God himself *wounded for our Transgressions, and bruised for our Iniquities,* undergoing such fearful Agonies and bitter Passions, in order to open a way for our Reconciliation and Salvation; and that God would not pardon Sinners and restore them to Favour, without an Atonement offer'd for them of so extraordinary a Nature, as was never to be repeated, and cou'd never be equal'd.

Our Author indeed is pleas'd to make a very disadvantageous Representation of this Part of the Scripture-Doctrine, p. 418, 419 *. where speaking of the Heathens he saith, " They might have
" been so perverse as not to imagine, that pardon-
" ing the Guilty and punishing the Innocent,
" cou'd either shew irreconcilable Enmity to
" Guilt, or Love for Innocency; and perhaps
" might think very oddly of a Prince, who tho'
" he freely pardon'd his repenting Rebels, yet
" shou'd cause his most loyal and only Son to be
" put to death, to shew his Hatred to Rebellion,
" and to vindicate the Honour of those Laws
" which

“ which forbid putting an innocent Person to
 “ death, or any Person to be instrumental to his
 “ own Death, much more to sacrifice himself.
 “ Cou’d those Philosophers, who did not imagine
 “ any Virtue in sacrificing of Beasts to wash away
 “ the Sins of Men, easily conceive a human Sa-
 “ crifice, which they believ’d human Nature ab-
 “ horr’d, to be an Expiation for Sins? Or, that
 “ Sins freely pardon’d can want any Expiation?
 “ Or, that all was mere Mercy and pure Forgive-
 “ ness after a full Equivalent paid, and adequate
 “ Satisfaction given?”

It is not easy to find so few Words any where
 fuller of Bitterness and Misrepresentation than this
 Paragraph; but if this Doctrine had been fairly
 stated, as the Scripture represents it, the Weak-
 ness and Impertinence of these Objections wou’d
 have appear’d at once.

The first Thing the Author offers is, that it is
 hard to imagine, “ how pardoning the Guilty
 “ and punishing the Innocent, cou’d either shew
 “ irreconcilable Enmity to Guilt, or Love for
 “ Innocence.”

I answer, that the Sufferings even of an inno-
 cent Person may shew Hatred against Sin, and de-
 monstrate the Justice and Righteousness of a wise
 Governor, supposing that Person to have freely
 undertaken to stand in the place of the Offenders,
 and to answer for them, or suffer in their stead.
 In this Case the Punishment is as really the Pu-
 nishment of the Crime, and does as truly shew the
 Legislator’s Displeasure against it, as if the Offend-
 ers themselves had personally suffer’d. It is still
 the Sin that is punish’d, though not in the Person
 of the Offender himself, yet in the Person of him
 that undertook to bear the Punishment for him;
 and consequently in this case Justice is manifested,
 and the Authority of the Law vindicated, as truly

as if the Offender himself had been punish'd in his own Person.

When this Author talks of *punishing the Innocent*, it ought to be consider'd, that the suffering Person in the Case here referr'd to is not to be consider'd abstractly as an *innocent* Person, (for it will easily be granted that to punish an innocent Person consider'd as innocent is unjust) but as an innocent Person that has brought himself by his own Consent under an Obligation to suffer for another. And tho' our Author puts this Objection into the Mouth of the Heathens, yet the learned *Grotius*, a very proper Judge of such Matters, doubts not to affirm, that by the Consent of all Nations one Man might justly be punish'd for the Crimes committed by another, where there was a Substitution or voluntary Susception of the one for the other. See *Grotius de Satisfac. Christi, cap. 4.* Hence the right of putting Hostages to death among the most civiliz'd Nations, and of Sureties being punish'd in Capital Matters, if the Guilty appear'd not, who were thence call'd ἀντίψυχοι, who were bound to answer Body for Body. In pecuniary Matters it was always thought just to prosecute and imprison one Man for another's Debt, which he has taken upon himself, which depends upon this Principle, That one Man may put himself in another's stead, and suffer for him. There are many Reasons indeed why such Substitutions shou'd not be ordinarily accepted in Capital Matters. Accordingly it was not ordinarily allow'd in the *Roman* Laws, not because they look'd upon it to be unjust in itself, as *Grotius* there shews, but because of the Inconveniencies that might arise from it. To suffer an innocent Person to offer himself to Death for the Guilty, wou'd in many Cases be a Damage to the Commonwealth, which wou'd thereby lose an excellent Member and Subject, to
save

save a corrupt one; nor wou'd it be in the power of the Prince or State in such a Case, to recompense so glorious an Act of Friendship and Goodness, which he that did it cou'd not outlive. But with regard to the Substitution of Christ, for guilty Mankind, the Case is quite different. For he is suppos'd to be one that not only freely offered himself to suffer instead of the Guilty, and to take their Punishment on himself, but that he is one that had an absolute Power over his own Life, a Power not only to lay it down, but to take it again by rising from the Dead. In which Case it was only a temporary Suffering that he endured, and this Suffering afterwards succeeded and compensated by the highest Exaltation and Glory in that Nature which suffer'd and died. And if any Case cou'd be found parallel to this in human Governments, I challenge this Author to shew any thing in it contrary to Wisdom or Justice.

The Case he is pleas'd to put is vastly different, concerning a King, "who tho' he freely pardon'd
 " his repenting Rebels, yet shou'd *cause* his most
 " loyal and only Son to be put to death, to shew
 " his Hatred to Rebellion, and vindicate the Honour of the Laws." If he *caus'd* his Son to be put to death instead of the Rebels without his own Consent, (and the Author expresses it, as if this were the Case) nothing cou'd be more cruel or unjust. But if the Son shou'd freely and generously undertake to suffer for a guilty City or Province, that had by an inexcusable Rebellion forfeited their Privileges and incurr'd a severe Punishment, tho' this wou'd argue a signal Goodness in him, it cou'd never be suppos'd that the King his Father wou'd accept it; for this obvious Reason, that in this Case an excellent Prince whose Goodness was so eminent, wou'd be lost both to his Father and to the Commonwealth, both of whom had an Interest

terest in his Life. But in the present Case, tho' the Son of God consented to die, it was impossible he shou'd be holden of Death. He soon rose again, and was not lost to the World or to his heavenly Father, and his wonderful Goodness was amply and gloriously rewarded.

As to what the Author adds, that "the Laws forbid putting an innocent Person to death, or any Person to be any way instrumental to his own Death, much more to sacrifice himself;" I answer, that supposing an innocent Person cou'd by dying save a whole Nation from certain Ruin, no Laws cou'd be suppos'd to forbid his exposing himself freely to Death for so valuable an End. Nor wou'd this be esteem'd, as this Gentleman meanly insinuates, a being criminally *instrumental to his own Death*, or an unlawful *sacrificing of himself*, but wou'd be justly esteem'd a laudable and glorious Action, an Instance of consummate Goodness, and publick Spirit, worthy of the highest Praises.

But he further asks, "Cou'd those Philosophers who did not imagine any Virtue in sacrificing of Beasts to wash away the Sins of Men, easily conceive a human Sacrifice, which they believ'd human Nature abhorr'd, to be an Expiation for Sins?" I think we need not much concern ourselves about the Opinion of a few of the Philosophers, when 'tis certain that it was a Notion that generally prevail'd among all Nations that some Sacrifice or Expiation was necessary to appease an offended Deity. And whatever those Philosophers might alledge, there is no likelihood they wou'd ever have cur'd the World of those bloody Oblations, whether of Men or Beasts, * But the Christian Doctrine has done it effectually, by directing
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* See more concerning this, Part 1. p. 256, &c.

our Thoughts to an Atonement of an infinitely higher and nobler Nature. And whosoever believes that Christ is the *Propitiation for our Sins, and not for our's only, but for the Sins of the whole World*, and that he *hath by One offering up of himself for ever perfected them that are sanctified*; will never think of any other Sacrifice or Expiation as necessary for the Sins of Men. And since those Philosophers who most abhorr'd human Sacrifices wou'd not have thought it absurd that a good Man shou'd suffer and die to rescue a whole Community from certain Danger and Ruin, I can't conceive how they cou'd justly or consistently find fault with Christ's giving up his own Life, and submitting to the most grievous Sufferings for the Redemption of Mankind.

But this Author further adds, that these Philosophers cou'd not conceive, that "Sins freely pardon'd cou'd want an Expiation; or that all was mere Mercy and pure Forgiveness, after a full Equivalent paid, and adæquate Satisfaction given."

But it must be consider'd, that Christ's Satisfaction is not a Payment made and offered by us, but is only an Expedient provided by God in his infinite Wisdom and Goodness for exercising his Mercy in such a manner as is best suited to the great Ends of his Government, and to the harmonious Exercise of his illustrious moral Excellencies. 'Tis true, nothing can have a greater Tendency to fill us with adoring Thoughts of God's Holiness and Justice, and the Regard he hath to the Honour and Authority of his Government and Laws, than that he wou'd not pardon Sinners and restore them to Favour without the Interposition of a Mediator of infinite Dignity, who was to make Atonement for their Sins by his own most grievous Sufferings; but when we consider that God him-
self

self, in his own infinite Wisdom and Love, appointed his own Son to be this Mediator and Propitiation for our Sins, and gave him up for us all, this shews the highest Love to Mankind that can possibly be conceiv'd. And those that believe this must certainly be fill'd with a higher Admiration of God's infinite Grace and Mercy towards us, than if by a mere Act of Sovereignty he had forgiven all the Sins of Mankind without any Satisfaction or Propitiation at all. For in this Case he freely forgives and saves them as well as in the other; that is, he does it of his own mere Grace and Goodness, without any thing on their Parts, that cou'd properly merit such a Favour; and not only this, but to open a way for his doing it in the properest Manner, he gave his Son, the most glorious and unspeakable Gift of his Love, for our Salvation. This is deservedly spoken of in Scripture in Terms that represent it as a Love and Grace that calls for our highest Admiration, and is beyond all parallel. Upon the whole, when we are taught to regard Pardon and Life and all the Benefits we receive, as coming to us thro' the Blood of Christ, this shews that these Benefits are conferr'd upon us in a way of rich Grace and Mercy, and yet in such a way as serves also to manifest his Holiness and Justice. Thus we are to regard God in the whole Method of our Salvation both as infinitely gracious and merciful, and as infinitely just and holy. This is the Idea of God which the Gospel instructs us to carry with us continually in all our Approaches to the Deity, an Idea equally venerable and charming, most amiable, and most awful. Hence we are to do all in the Name of Christ, and thro' him to offer up all our Prayers; than which nothing can be more admirably contriv'd to preserve upon our Minds a constant Sense of God's Justice and Purity and Authority, and

at the same time to fill us with the most thankful Admiration of his infinite Grace and Mercy ; and both together make up that Temper and Disposition which best becomes reasonable Creatures towards God.

As to what the Author adds in the Person of *B.* concerning *the same God receiving Satisfaction from and giving Satisfaction to the same God, and yet neither giving nor receiving Satisfaction ;* I shall make no other Reflection on this and several other Passages in which he cavils at and misrepresents the Doctrine of the Trinity, than to observe that tho' Christians have generally maintain'd that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, are partakers of the same infinite Nature and glorious Perfections, yet they have also acknowledg'd and asserted such a Distinction between them as is sufficient to lay a Foundation for the different Parts they bear in the wonderful Scheme of our Salvation ; tho' what is the precise Nature of this Distinction and this Unity, they are not able to explain. Nor is this alone a sufficient Objection, since there are many Things of which we have undoubted Evidence that are attended with Difficulties, which thro' the Narrowness of our Minds we are not able to solve. What the Nature of that Unity and Simplicity is which belongs to God, and what Distinction there may be in the divine Nature consistent with that Unity, we cannot pretend distinctly to explain, except we knew God and his incomprehensible Nature far better than, in this present State, we can without the highest Arrogance pretend to do. It is easy on such a Subject to *darken Counsel by Words without Knowledge*, and in talking of the infinite Nature of God to lose and confound ourselves, and to think we argue very subtilly, whilst we only discover our own Rashness and Ignorance. It is the easiest Thing in the World, when talking of Things

Things so remote from our Apprehensions, to raise Difficulties; and if I were dispos'd or cou'd allow myself to take rash Liberties on such awful Subjects, I cou'd produce Things with regard to the Eternity of God, his Immensity, and other unquestionable Attributes of the divine Nature which wou'd carry as great an Appearance of Contradiction, as what this Writer offers concerning the blessed Trinity. I own it is a *Mystery*, as he calls it; and if we must have a Religion without Mysteries, we must cast off natural Religion itself, and have recourse to downright Atheism, which yet involves the most unintelligible Mysteries of all.



C H A P. XVI.

An Answer to the Author's Objections against the Christian Revelation, drawn from its not having been equally given to all Mankind, and at all Times; and from the Corruption of Christians. The Conclusion.

TH E R E is nothing which this Author and the other Enemies of Revelation seem to lay a greater Stress upon, than that if there were any Revelation at all, it must be given equally to all Mankind, and at all Times; which since neither the Jewish nor Christian Revelation was, this alone is a sufficient Proof that neither the one nor the other was a true Revelation from God.

But supposing the Proofs already alledg'd for the Scripture-Revelation to be just, this Consideration alone cannot destroy the Evidence. Must we deny that a Revelation is useful, which we see

in fact is so? or must we, when a Revelation comes attended with Proofs as strong and cogent as the Nature of the thing can well admit, and as we cou'd reasonably expect or desire, supposing that a Revelation were really given, must we resist the force of all these Proofs and Evidences, for no other Reason but this, that this Revelation is not given to all Mankind as well as to ourselves? This seems to me perfectly unreasonable. Its not being given to all is a Difficulty, but it is a Difficulty in the divine Dispensations which we are not oblig'd to resolve, and which proceeds only upon our Ignorance of the Reasons and Ends of the divine Government, and the Methods of God's Dealings with Mankind, which tho' always in themselves wise and just, yet are not what we are always able to explain. It wou'd be counted unreasonable in any other Instance to deny our own Blessings or Privileges, merely because all others are not Partakers of them as well as we, or not in the same degree. Can't we be thankful for our own Advantages, and leave others to God, who we are sure will deal most justly and equitably with them, and make all the Allowances for them that their Circumstances do require?

But let us enter on a more particular Examination of the Author's Objections. The Sum of what he offers may be reduc'd to these two Heads. 1. He thinks that if God judg'd it necessary to send a Saviour, he wou'd have sent him from the Beginning of the World, and not have deferr'd it for 4000 Years. 2. That if he gave a Revelation at all, he wou'd have given it to all Mankind; and he thinks it absurd to suppose, that he gave it only to some Part of 'em, when the far greater Part of Mankind have been in all Ages, and still are without the Benefit of it.

Let us distinctly consider each of these.

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As to the first, he asks, "If God always acts
" for the good of his Creatures, what Reason can
" be assign'd, why God shou'd not from the Be-
" ginning have discover'd such Things as make
" for their Good, but defer it till the Time of
" *Tiberius*? since the sooner this was done, the
" greater wou'd his Goodness appear to be.——
" If the Necessities of Mankind have always been
" as great, and the Goodness of God always the
" same, wou'd not these oblige him to have pre-
" scrib'd an immediate Remedy to the Disease,
" and not deferr'd it for 4000 Years together?
" p. 393, 401 *.

I wou'd remark upon this, first, that tho' we
cou'd assign no Reasons for this at all, this wou'd
not be a proper Objection. For will any say, that
God can have no Reasons for his Proceedure, but
we must know them? Or is our not being able
to assign any Reason for it a sufficient Evidence,
or even Presumption that no Reason can be as-
sign'd? Can we assign the Reason why God did
not create the World and Mankind, infinite Ages
sooner than he did? since (to use the Author's Ex-
pressions) *his Goodness* (which was the impulsive
Cause of his creating the World) *was always the*
same, and the sooner it was done, the greater wou'd
his Goodness appear to be. But it wou'd argue an
inexcusable Rashness to pretend to censure every
thing in the divine Proceedure, that we do not at
present see the Reason of.

But after all, several Reasons may be assign'd to
shew, that Christ's being sent at the Time when
he actually came, answer'd many valuable and im-
portant Ends, which wou'd not have been so well
answer'd, if he had been sent immediately after
the Fall.

If he had been sent in the Beginning of the
G g 3 World,

* P. 356, 363.

World, the Doctrine of a Saviour wou'd probably have been treated as the Stories of the fabulous Ages. It wou'd have been said that he appear'd in an Age of Ignorance and Barbarism, when Arts and Letters were in their Infancy, and consequently when Mankind might easily be impos'd upon, not having been yet refin'd and inlightned by Learning and Philosophy. And if these Gentlemen now make it an Objection against believing the Facts recorded in the Gospel, that they were done so long ago, under pretence that the Evidence grows continually less in proportion to the Distance of Time; what wou'd they have said, if the Saviour had appear'd some thousands of Years sooner? Add to this, that the need the World stood in of a Saviour wou'd not have been so apparent, if he had come in the Beginning. If notwithstanding the uncontested Proofs of that Corruption, Idolatry and Ignorance, into which the World had fallen, and the long Trial that was made of what human Learning and Philosophy cou'd do, and that it was found by the Experience of many Ages to be utterly insufficient to reclaim Mankind, yet there are so many that represent his Coming as altogether needless, what wou'd they have done if it had not been tried whether the World cou'd do without it? Besides, if Christ had come at the Beginning, the Evidence wou'd not have been near so strong; and yet as it was a Thing of the greatest Importance, so it was proper it shou'd be confirm'd by all the Attestations a Thing of that Nature is capable of. He wou'd have wanted the Testimony arising from the Predictions of a Succession of Prophets, who liv'd and prophesied in different Ages at a great Distance of Time from one another, and conspir'd with a wonderful Harmony in their Predictions concerning a Saviour to come, some of them pointing

ing more particularly to one Circumstance, some to another, of his Person and Character and Offices. These various Prophecies, and the many Things in the Old-Testament Dispensation that were design'd as the Types and Prefigurations of the Messiah and his Benefits, were of great Use both to prepare the World for his Coming, and to give a noble Testimony to him when he actually came; and the comparing these with the Accomplishment, yields a manifest Proof of the divine Wisdom and Faithfulness. And yet this is what this Writer is pleas'd to represent under the ridiculous Idea of discovering *Things as it were grudgingly, little by little, here a Bit and there a Bit*, p. 394 *. Thus it appears, that Christ's Coming into the World, by being delay'd so long, was introduc'd with greater Solemnity and Advantage, with stronger Proofs and more illustrious Attestations. And if it was proper, for these and other wise Reasons, that his Coming shou'd be delay'd for many Ages, the unavoidable Consequence of this was, that the Advantage of a distinct Knowledge of him cou'd not be had for many Ages. But then it must be consider'd, that as a distinct Knowledge of him cou'd not then be had, so neither was a distinct Knowledge of him then requir'd. And if it be further consider'd, what the Scriptures lead us to conclude, that that Mercy of God in a Redeemer which was more fully display'd at his actual Coming, was actually applied in all Ages from the Beginning to the truly Penitent and Sincere; and that the Virtue of his Oblation, which was from the Beginning present to God's Omniscience, was all along effectual for their Pardon and Acceptance, this takes off the main Difficulty that might be urg'd against the Delay.

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* P. 356.

Let us now consider the other Objection advanced by the Author against the Christian Revelation, taken from its not being given equally to all Mankind. Upon this he frequently and pathetically declaims. He urges, that “all the Arguments that can be urged from the Necessities of Mankind, and the abundant Goodness of God, will equally prove that this Revelation should be universal, as that it should be at all, p. 401 *.” He asks, p. 399. “What human Legislator, if he found a Defect in his Laws, and thought it for the Good of his Subjects to add new Laws, would not promulgate them to all his People? What Parent would act in so partial a manner, as the Doctor in a self-confounding Scheme supposes the common Parent of Mankind has done, and not let all his Children know as soon as possible what was for their common Good? Especially if they were in such a forlorn and miserable Condition, as he represents all Mankind to have been in, almost as soon as created?” And he asks, p. 401. “Can a Being be denominated merciful and good, that is so only to a few, but cruel and unmerciful to the rest?”

There are two things the Author’s Charge against the Christian Revelation here turns upon. The one is, that it supposes God to have dealt cruelly and unmercifully towards the Heathens: The other is, that it supposes him to have manifested a great Partiality towards Christians, unbecoming the common Parent of Mankind.

I see no just Ground for the first Part of the Charge, that of Cruelty towards the Heathens, since we suppose, as well as the Author, that God made such Discoveries to the Heathens by the Light of Nature, as if duly attended to, and improved, would have caused them to see the Absurdity of that

that Idolatry, Vice, and Corruption, in which they were so generally involved; and besides this, at sundry Times and in divers Manners gave extraordinary Discoveries of his Will from the beginning of the World by external Revelation*.

It appears even from the short Hints given in Scripture, that there were extraordinary Revelations from the Beginning given to the first Heads and Parents of Mankind, and transmitted to their Descendants by a Tradition which it was easy to preserve, and it highly concern'd them to do so. Besides which, God was wont to communicate his Will by special Revelation to particular good Men, for the Use of Mankind in those early Times, both before and after the Flood. Accordingly there is reason to think, that for some time the main Principles of the Patriarchal Religion (which was a Mixture of natural and reveal'd Religion) were preserved; as may be concluded from the Instances of *Melchisedek* and others in *Canaan*, besides *Job* and his Friends, whom the *Jews* represent as Prophets among the *Gentiles*. And it is probable there were many good Men in those Times among the Nations, though not particularly taken notice of in Scripture, as not relating to the History of the *Jews* or their Ancestors, which the sacred Historians have particularly in view. And indeed there continued for a long time many remarkable Traces of the primitive Religion among the *Gentiles*. Particularly there were Traditions among them (as many learned Men have shewn) though disguised and corrupted with many Fables, concerning the Creation of the World and of Mankind, concerning a primitive uncorrupted State of the human Nature, and Man's Fall from that State, concerning God's Justice and Hatred against Sin, and his Mercy

* See concerning this the Postscript to the 2d Part of the Scripture vindicated.

Mercy and Reconcilableness to Sinners, (to keep up a Sense of which, was the great Design of that most ancient Rite of Sacrificing, which obtain'd throughout the World, and was originally of divine Appointment) and probably the Notion of a future State that obtain'd among the Nations, and the Knowledge they had even of some of the main Principles of natural Religion, was derived to them by ancient Tradition; as *Cicero* owns particularly with respect to the Immortality of the Soul, in his first Book of the *Tusculan Questions*.

But if in process of Time all Mankind universally corrupted the Religion they had received both by Tradition and the Light of Nature, this was not owing to any want of Goodness in God, but wholly to their own Fault; he did not bring them into this State of Ignorance, Idolatry and Corruption, but they brought themselves into it; it was not that there was any *Defect in his Laws*, as the Author represents it, or in the Discoveries he had made, which were sufficient for the time then present, but it was because of a Neglect inexcusable in things of such Importance they lost and perverted those Discoveries. And this being the Case, if he had never given any new extraordinary Discoveries or Revelations of his Will to Mankind at all, none could have accused his Justice or Goodness. But yet it pleased him still to carry on his gracious Design for the Good of Mankind. And having given a preparatory Dispensation, which tho' more peculiarly exhibited to the *Jews*, was of great use for spreading the Knowledge of the true Religion among other Nations, he at last in the time that seem'd most fit to his all-comprehending Wisdom and Goodness, sent his own Son for the Redemption of Mankind, to bring in the last and most perfect Revelation that had ever been made to the World; and which in its
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original Design was intended and ordered to be publish'd to all Nations, and accordingly made a surprizing Progress in the first Ages of Christianity through a great part of the known World; and probably would have spread far more universally than it has hitherto done, if the primitive Purity and Zeal for Religion had continued. And the Scriptures give us ground to hope, that there is a Time coming when the Gospel shall be more universally diffused than hitherto it has been; and in the mean time the *Gentiles* who never heard of the Gospel, are not put into a worse Condition, or more cast out of the divine Favour, than if there had been no such Revelation at all.

This being the true State of the Case, I can see no just Foundation for the Clamours the Author raises, and the Charge he brings against the Advocates for Revelation, that they suppose God to have dealt cruelly and unmercifully with the *Gentiles*. On the contrary, I think it is evident, that they suppose God to have done more for the *Gentiles*, than he supposes him to have done; since besides the common Light of Nature, they suppose the Nations to have had the Advantage of extraordinary Revelation, till they intirely lost and corrupted both that and natural Religion too. And if God afterwards, when they had all corrupted their Way, suffered the greatest part of Mankind to continue in that State of Ignorance and Corruption, into which they had brought themselves, this is what the Author must own as well as we. For it is a matter of Fact that cannot possibly be denied, that the *Gentiles* were universally sunk into a State of the most deplorable Ignorance, Idolatry, and Corruption, and that they continued in that State for many Ages, and the greatest part of them continue so to this Day; and therefore that God suffer'd them to fall into that State, and to continue
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in it; and consequently that it was not inconsistent with his Goodness to do so.

The Substance of the Author's labour'd Harangue on this Subject, depends either upon gross Misrepresentation, as when he represents the Advocates for Revelation as maintaining that God himself both *caused* the Heathens to fall into a State of unavoidable Corruption and Degeneracy, and that he *continues* them in it*; and that he will *cast them out of his Favour for mere Impossibilities, or for not observing the Laws he never gave them*; or else may be turn'd upon himself, and bears as hard upon natural Religion as upon revealed. As when he asks, whether God did not foresee the Ignorance and Corruption of Mankind, and if he foresaw it, why did he not prevent it? a way of talking that leads to downright Atheism, and is a bold arraignment of divine Providence.

Indeed after all the Noise the Author makes about the Cruelty of supposing the Heathens to have been left for many Ages in a State of Corruption and Degeneracy, yet provided it were but acknowledged, that all Mankind, in all Ages, were left, and still are so, without any extraordinary Revelation at all, to rescue them out of that Idolatry and Corruption, (which is his own Supposition;) he would not find fault, nor think it any Reflection on the divine Goodness. So that the real Charge is not that many of the *Gentiles* were and are suffer'd to go on in their ways without the Assistance of extraordinary Revelation, but that all of them, in all Ages, were not left without that Assistance; as if it were a greater Goodness to give this Advantage to none at all, than to give it to a great number, except it were given alike to all. For abstractly from the Consideration of God's favouring others with more signal Advantages, I don't find this

* See more concerning this, Part 1. p. 103, & seq.

this Author would judge his Treatment of the *Gentiles* cruel and unmerciful.

This leads me to consider the second Part of the Author's Charge, that of Partiality. The Course of his Reasoning in several parts of his Book, and particularly in his last Chapter, proceeds upon this Principle, That since God is universally good, and equally so at all times, he must at all times equally promote the Happiness of all Mankind, and give them all equal Means and Opportunities for obtaining it; and that he cannot do more for some of the human Race than for others, without the Imputation of Partiality, since he is equally the Parent of them all, who has an equal Love to all his Offspring.

But however specious this way of talking may appear at first View, yet it is certainly wrong; since it is undeniably evident in Fact to any one that considers the ordinary Course of Things, and the usual Methods of divine Providence, that God does distribute his Blessings in a remarkable Variety, and in much greater Abundance to some than to others. The Author himself cannot deny, that God makes some Orders of Beings with far nobler Endowments, and capable of a far higher Happiness than others; yea, he seems to think, that this Variety and Inequality of the Creatures is *necessary to shew the great Extent of the divine Goodness*, p. 408, 409 *. He supposes indeed, that God *will bestow on the rational Creation all the Happiness their Nature is capable of*; but still, if he makes them with vastly different Capacities, and makes some of them naturally capable of a much higher and nobler Happiness than others, I don't see but this, according to our Author's way of reasoning, might be charged as a partial and an unequal Proceedure, since the very bestowing these

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Capacities is as much the Gift of God as the bestowing the Happiness suited to those Capacities.

But if, by this Gentleman's own Acknowledgment, God's being equally the Father of all intellectual Beings, (for so he undoubtedly is) is no Argument that therefore he must make them all equal in their Capacities and Opportunities for Happiness; then his being equally the Father of all Mankind, is no Argument that therefore he must give to all Men equal Advantages for Happiness, and equal Means and Opportunities for obtaining it. And accordingly, if we take a View of the Methods of divine Providence towards Mankind, we shall find that not only have some Men a much larger share of what are usually called the Goods of Fortune (but which are really the Gifts of Providence) than others, Riches, Honours, and all those outward Emoluments and Accommodations that contribute to the Ease and Satisfaction of Life; but that with respect to natural Endowments, whether of Body or Mind, and intellectual or moral Accomplishments, they are dispensed with great Variety. 'Tis evident, that many have a happier Temperament, better natural Dispositions, a quicker Apprehension, a clearer Understanding, and sounder Judgment than others. And these Advantages can't be said to be the Effects of greater Merit on their parts, since they are given them antecedently to any such Merit. Add to this, that many have much greater Helps, and are placed in much more advantageous Circumstances than others for improving in Virtue, in Wisdom, and Goodness, and every thing that tends to the Dignity and Happiness of the human Nature. And though this Author frequently represents it as absurd to suppose that any Man should be happy or unhappy because born in such a Country or at such a Time, yet it is evident in Fact, that the Circumstances of Persons Birth
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and Education, their being born in such an Age, or in such a Country, or of such and such Parents, has often a vast Influence on their future Conduct, and consequently on their Happiness. Nor can it be denied, that many from their Birth are destitute of Advantages which others naturally not more deserving than they, and which have done nothing antecedently to merit such a Distinction, are favour'd with. Compare one of the wild and barbarous Savages, bred up to Spoil and Rapine, and in an utter Ignorance of God and his Worship, and the main Principles even of natural Religion, not cultivated with the Improvements of Science, or Ornaments of Virtue; with another that has had the Happiness to be born in a Country of greater Advantages, and of good and worthy Parents, and who has been early season'd with just Notions of Things, civilized by Arts, adorn'd with useful Knowledge, carefully train'd up in the Ways of Virtue, and in a Sense of what is just and decent, and honourable; vast is the Difference, and unspeakable the Advantages of the one above the other. They look almost like Creatures of a different Species. And indeed the Author himself, though he all along represents the Law of Nature as the Rule God hath given all Mankind to act by, and by pursuing which they shall be happy, yet supposes that some Men have much better Capacities, and greater Opportunities for knowing it than others. For he frequently talks of Mens knowing as much of the Law of Nature as is *necessary for them in their Circumstances*, which plainly supposes, that some are placed much more advantageous for knowing that Law than others, though Allowance shall be made for their different Circumstances.

It appears then from evident Fact and Experience, that though God be equally the Parent of
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all Mankind, and in the Methods of his kind Providence does much good to all, indeed far more to all than they deserve; yet he does far more for some than for others of the same Species, and places them in much more advantageous Circumstances. There is undeniably a vast difference between some Nations and others, and between some Persons and Families in the same Nation and others, in all the Advantages belonging to the human Nature. Now I ask, whence comes this? is it order'd by divine Providence, or not? if not, Providence orders nothing. If a good Constitution of Body, a good natural Temper and Disposition, a clear Understanding, a sound Judgment, a happy Education, great Advantages for Improvement in Knowledge and Virtue, if these things, which are of such Importance to our Happiness, are not to be regarded as the Blessings of Providence, and if the divine Goodness towards us is not to be acknowledged in them, it is not to be acknowledged in any thing at all; his Providence does not concern itself with Mankind, but all things are left to a blind Chance or Fortune. And if this be the Author's Opinion, he is greatly defective even in some of the fundamental Articles of that natural Religion, for which he professes so great a Zeal. But if Providence has a hand in these things, then 'tis plain that the divine Goodness eminently and remarkably distinguishes some of the human Species above others, and gives to some much greater Advantages for Improvement in Knowledge and Virtue, and consequently in Happiness, not only in this World but in the next; supposing Men's Happiness in the next World shall be proportion'd to the Improvement they make in Virtue and Goodness here, as it must be if this World be design'd as a State of Trial for another.

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And now may not the Author's Declamation be as well applied in this Case, as in the Case of giving a Revelation to some and not to others? Might it not be said, that if God is equally the Parent of all Mankind, *who beholds all the Dwellers on the Earth, free from Partiality and Prejudice*, why has he made so vast a Difference between some and others of the human Race, both in their natural Endowments, and in their Advantages for Improvement in Knowledge and Virtue, and consequently in Happiness? Why has he not given them all equal Capacities, and equal Opportunities for being happy both here and hereafter? Why has he placed some of them from their Birth in Circumstances so vastly more advantageous than others, though it cannot be said, either that the one merited before they were born, or that the other were naturally more undeserving than they? Is not this to suppose, that he *shews an extraordinary Kindness to some People without any Consideration of their greater Merits*, and that he makes a Distinction between them and others before they had *done either Good or Evil*, which is what he blames the Apostle Paul for supposing, p. 335*? How can *infinite Goodness, which is always the same, make such Inequality among Men* in the Distributions of his Benefits? I might easily apply the rest of the Author's Declamation this way; but not to urge this any further, I shall only observe, that if he has the Interests of natural Religion really at heart, he is as much concern'd to answer such Questions as we are. The true Answer to this and all such Difficulties is, that we may be sure God has most just and wise Reasons for his proceeding in such a manner, though we are not at present acquainted with them; and that his making so great a Difference as we see he does in the Distributions of his

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Gifts, and in Advantages for Happiness, between some Orders of intellectual Beings and others, and between some of the same Species of Beings and others, is very consistent with his universal Goodness, though we are not able distinctly to account for it through the Narrowness of our Views, and for want of taking in Things in their just Harmony. It would be foolish to deny that God does make such a Difference between some and others, when we find in fact that he does so; and it would be impious to say, that this is not consistent with his universal paternal Goodness, merely because we are not well able to explain how it is so.

This might be sufficient to take off the Force of the Author's Objection against Revelation, as taken merely from its not being given equally to all Mankind. But since he takes so much pains to expose Dr. *Clark*, for supposing that Christians shall be Partakers of a higher Happiness than the Heathens, I shall examine this a little.

It seems evident, that if Men's future Reward and Happiness shall be proportion'd to the different Improvements they have made in Virtue and Goodness here, then those that have greater Opportunities and better Means for making such an Improvement, have Means put into their hands for obtaining a higher Happiness; and whatever Principles tend to their higher Improvement in Goodness, tend also to prepare them for a higher Felicity. And if our Author by saying, that *all that are equally sincere are equally acceptable to God*, means, as he seems to do, that all those whose Intentions are equally honest shall be equally rewarded in a future State, notwithstanding the different Improvements they have made, it is far from being true. I don't doubt many of the vulgar Heathens were as honest Men, as sincere according to their Ability, as some of those of the most eminent and
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shining Characters among them ; and yet I question whether this Author himself would affirm, that supposing a future State of Retributions, they shall be perfectly on a Level hereafter. Nor can I see any Beauty or Propriety in this levelling Scheme.

Now therefore let us compare a common Christian that is sincere, and endeavours to live up to the Laws of the Gospel, with a common Heathen whom we will also suppose to be an honest Man ; let us suppose them both to be just and benevolent towards Mankind, and to be sober and temperate ; yet besides that the Christian is taught by the Gospel to aspire after a higher Measure of inward universal Purity, there is this remarkable Difference between them, that the one instructed by the holy Scriptures exercises himself in Acts of vital Piety and Devotion towards the living and true God, whom he daily worships, loves and reverences with a pure Adoration, seeking for Happiness in his Favour and Presence, and setting Him before him in his general Course ; the other is involved in the Idolatries and Superstitions of his Country, and pays his Worship to fictitious Deities, whom he adores with absurd and superstitious Rites. Let us suppose that he thinks this to be right, and acts according to a mistaken Conscience ; (for as to the Philosophers, who, according to our Author, despised the common Idolatry and Superstition, and yet countenanced it by their Maxims and by their Practice, I look upon their Case to be worse, as they had less Honesty.) Is it reasonable upon such a View of Things to suppose, that the one of these shall be equally rewarded in a future State with the other ? When the one is supposed to have been diligent in the several Branches of his Duty towards God and Man, and the other only in Part of his Duty, and greatly deficient in another Part of it, equally

fit and just and necessary in itself, and equally requir'd in the divine Law ?

It appears on this View, that this Author states the Case very unfairly, when he represents his Adversaries as supposing that God *arbitrarily* assigns Christians a higher Happiness than others, merely for their believing *a Set of Opinions taught in that Country where they happen to be born*, without any regard to their moral Agency ; this, which is the Strength of what he offers on this Head, p. 409 *, &c. is gross Misrepresentation. If they suppose Christians to be admitted to a higher Happiness, they also suppose their Virtue to be of a far higher and nobler kind, and that they are engaged in a better Course of Action.

If it be said, that the Difference between them is owing to their different Advantages ; besides that the Author cannot alledge this without supposing, that the Revelation Christians enjoy gives them a great Advantage above the Heathens who were destitute of that Revelation, which would be utterly to subvert his whole Scheme ; besides this I say, this would be to set up a new Rule of Judgment, *viz.* That every Man must be judged not according to what he actually did in the Circumstances he was in, but what he might, or would have done, if he had been in other Circumstances. So a Man that had the misfortune to be bred up from his Infancy to Robbery, Vice, and Wickedness of all kinds, under Parents guilty of those Crimes, might plead that if he had been born of wise and virtuous Parents, and had the Advantage of good early Instructions and a virtuous Education, good Company and good Examples, he would not have fallen into those wicked Courses, which as he was circumstanced he could scarce avoid ; and that another who is a good Man, and has behaved soberly, and honestly, and virtuously, if from the beginning he

had been under the same Disadvantages, might or would probably have been as wicked and profligate as he. But is this any Argument that therefore the one should not be punish'd, or that the other should be deprived of his Reward, because of what might have happen'd in other Conjunctions and Circumstances? A Man's being from the beginning under very disadvantageous Circumstances, may in many Cases be admitted as an Excuse or Alleviation of his Crime, and this is all that can be made of it; but certainly it can never be pleaded as a Title to a Reward, or as giving him an equal Claim to it with another, who being placed in better Circumstances, has gone on in a better Course of Action.

Indeed, after all the Concern this Writer seems to shew for the Heathens, and though he finds so much fault with Dr. *Clark* for supposing that Christians shall be admitted to a higher Degree of Happiness, I cannot see how he can consistently entertain any favourable Thoughts of their Condition at all. If the Law of Nature has any Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments annex'd to it, (and otherwise to what purpose does this Author here talk of future Rewards at all?) it must promise these Rewards to those only that observe that Law, and must denounce Punishments against those that transgress and violate it, especially in any of the main Branches and important Duties of that Law. Now 'tis certain that the Duty we owe to God is as much a Part of the Law of Nature, and as evidently founded on Reason as that which we owe to our Fellow-Creatures; and 'tis also certain that the *Gentiles* were greatly deficient in that part of their Duty, being sunk in gross Superstition and Idolatry. What Pretence therefore could they have, upon this Gentleman's own Scheme, to a glorious Reward, if tried merely by the Law of Nature?

Will it be pretended, that they were diligent in their Duties to their Neighbours, but were they not equally obliged to the Duties they ow'd to God? And will their Observance of one Part of the Law of Nature, atone for their Neglect and Violation of another equally necessary and equally required? How would such a Plea look in human Judicatories? If a Man was impeach'd for Treason against his Prince, would it be sufficient to plead that he was a good Neighbour, and an honest Merchant? If he was accused of Adultery, would it be a proper Justification of him, to say he never committed Murder? The Author's Plea of Sincerity will here be of no avail. For Sincerity, as he explains it, supposes a Man to have done his best, and to have made the best Use of his Reason and moral Agency, which he cannot suppose the Heathens to have done; since he frequently asserts, that the common Reason of Mankind is sufficient to enable them to distinguish between Religion and Superstition, and to extricate them, if duly attended to, out of that Superstition in which they were educated; and he often speaks in the strongest Terms of the Clearness of that Light and Law of Nature which the Heathens enjoy'd, and must therefore suppose, that in giving way to Idolatry and Superstition (which in many places he makes to be a manifest Breach of the Law of Nature) they acted contrary to the clearest Light. He therefore cuts the Heathens off from the only Excuse that can be made for them, the Plea of Ignorance. Those that suppose the Heathens were in a State of great Darkeness, and under great Disadvantages, and could not, without very great difficulty, in the Circumstances they were in, discover their Duty, and obtain a right Knowledge of God and true Religion, may very consistently suppose, that a merciful God will make great Allowances for the
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the Circumstances they were under ; they may leave them to his infinite Mercy, and not presume to set Limits to it, or declare how far it may extend. But this Author has precluded himself from making this Excuse for them. He cannot allow this Excuse or Palliation of their Guilt, their having less Light than others. For he must suppose they had as much as the Christians. And indeed to suppose that the Christians, by the Revelation they enjoy, have great Advantages for the right Knowledge of God and of his Worship, and for the Practice of their Duty above the Heathens, would subvert his whole Scheme.

His Apology for the Heathens seems to confound itself. He would have the Heathens admitted to an equal Reward with the Christians, because they are equally sincere ; but their Sincerity can be vindicated on no other Foot, than their having less Light, and less Advantages than Christians ; and the Difference between their Light and that of the Christians can be ascrib'd to nothing but that the one have the Light of Revelation, and the other not ; and yet he pretends that this Revelation tends rather to mislead the People than direct them right.

Nor will his other Plea of Repentance and Amendment, which he supposes *do at all times put all Mankind on a Level with relation to their future Happiness*, p. 417*. be of any greater Advantage to the Heathens, except he can prove that they repented of their Impurities and Idolatries, so dishonourable to God, and contrary to the Law of Nature, and turn'd to the Love, and Worship, and pure Adoration of the only living and true God. If, as this Gentleman supposes, the Law of Nature was so very clear, that no well-meaning *Gentile* could be ignorant of it ; and yet they did not re-

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pent of or forsake what they knew or might very easily have known to be wrong, if they had attended to the Voice of Reason at all, how could they pretend to claim Pardon, much less a Reward, by virtue of a Repentance and Amendment so very defective? But 'tis certain in Fact, that no sooner was the Gospel publish'd among them, but many thousands all over the World repented of their Impurities and Idolatries, and turn'd from dead Idols to serve the living and true God, and from their vicious Courses to the Practice of Piety and Righteousness; which shews the great Advantage the Gospel brings to engage Men to Repentance, and the better Means and Opportunities those have that live under it, than those that want it.

Upon the whole; As to those of the *Gentiles* that were involved in Superstition and Idolatry, we can have as good or better hopes of them than the Author, because upon our Scheme there is more room for the Plea of Ignorance, and for favourable Allowances to be made them by infinite Mercy, considering the Disadvantage of their Circumstances. And as to those among them that have been in any Age or Nation exempted from the common Idolatry and Corruption, and that have been true Fearers and Worshippers of the Deity, and have walked in an humble Dependence on his infinite Mercy, and in the Practice of Righteousness, and how many there have been or are of these among them, is a Matter of Fact we cannot judge of; we may very consistently have a good Opinion of their State, which upon this Supposition would not be very different from that of the ancient Patriarchs.

And though he thinks it absurd to suppose that those can have any Benefit from the Death of Christ that never heard of him, yet if it be supposed that the appointed way of conferring the most valuable Blessings on guilty Mankind, is through a Mediator;

diator; and since all good Men in all Ages are represented in Scripture as forming one glorious Church triumphant above, one general Assembly and heavenly Society of which Christ the Redeemer is the universal Head and Lord; it may very consistently be suppos'd, that the Influence of his Redemption may extend to some who tho' they had a general Hope and Affiance in the divine Mercy, yet by their Situation and Circumstances, were rendred incapable of exercising a distinct Faith in the Mediator.

And on this Supposition it must be said, that tho' they did not know the Redeemer, or the particular Method of our Redemption here on Earth, yet as they shall fully know it in the heavenly World, and shall with Wonder and Joy (as the blessed Angels themselves are represented as now doing) behold *the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ*, so they shall join with the rest of the Redeem'd, in their delightful Praises to God and to the Redeemer; they shall be sensible of their great Obligations to him thro' whom they receiv'd many signal Benefits, tho' they did not know him before; and shall with a devout Admiration adore the infinite Wisdom, the Goodness, and Righteousness of God, in appointing this Method of Salvation, and settling this as the great Channel of Conveyance, thro' which the most valuable Blessings are convey'd to the human Race in all Ages. This Author wou'd find it no easy Matter to prove that there is any thing absurd or inconsistent, or unworthy of God in this Scheme.

I shall, before I conclude, take some Notice of what this Writer offers concerning the Corruption of Christians, which he enlarges upon at the latter End of his last Chapter. He thinks "no impartial Man that has compar'd the former and present State of Mankind, can think the World is
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“ much mended since the Days of *Tiberius*, or that
 “ Christians are arrived to any higher State of Per-
 “ fection, than the rest of Mankind, who are sup-
 “ pos’d to continue in their Degeneracy and Cor-
 “ ruption, p. 404 *.” And he goes on to pro-
 duce many Citations from Christian Writers, com-
 plaining of the present great Corruption and De-
 generacy among Christians.

But whatever this Writer thinks, yet it is evi-
 dent in Fact that never was there a more sudden
 and glorious Change than Christianity wrought at
 its first Appearance, and for some Ages after, both
 in the Doctrines and Manners of Men. Thousands
 all over the World that were before immers’d in
 the most gross and shameful Idolatries, and in the
 most abominable Vice and Wickedness, were
 brought to the Acknowledgment and pure Adora-
 tion of the only true God, and to the Practice of
 universal Righteousness, and an exemplary Purity
 of Heart and Life. The primitive Christians were,
 taking them generally, the most virtuous and most
 pious Body of Men that ever were in the World,
 the most devout Adorers of the Deity, the most
 strict Observers of Justice, Chastity, and Tem-
 perance, the most benevolent to Mankind. And
 indeed none were then admitted into the Commu-
 nity or Body of professed Christians, or kept in it,
 that were not at least free from scandalous Crimes.
 Thus it was whilst Christianity was preserv’d in
 some Degree of that primitive Purity and Simpli-
 city in which our Saviour left it. If afterwards,
 when it became the Religion of the State, and the
 way to Honours and Preferment, thousands came
 into the Church, not as before engag’d by the
 Light of Truth and Power of Evidence, but by
 worldly Principles and Motives, who were still
 Heathens in their Hearts, or of no Religion at all,
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and knew little of the Christian Faith and of its Practice less; if the Purity of the Christian Discipline was relax'd, or perverted to serve the Purposes of ambitious and factious Men; if from a false Policy and a Desire of drawing over those who had been accusom'd to the splendid Rites and Decorations of Heathenism, they departed from the majestick Simplicity of the Christian Worship, and introduc'd a Variety of foreign Ornaments and Rites; if by degrees the Christian Saints were substituted to the Heathen Demigods and Heroes, and the Worship of Images was introduc'd, and Paganism brought into the Church under a Christian Name; if under pretence of spiritual Powers and Privileges a mighty Domination was establish'd, and the Methods of Fraud and Cruelty made use of to exalt and to uphold it; this is no way chargeable on Christianity, but is owing to a manifest Defection from it. It only shews how the best Things may be abus'd thro' the Corruption of Mankind. And the proper Remedy against these and all such Abuses is, to adhere to the Christian Religion in its primitive Purity and Simplicity, as contain'd and exhibited in the Holy Scriptures.

And though there is at present a great Corruption among Christians, of which some good Men have complain'd in the Grief of their Hearts, perhaps in Terms too strong and extensive, (which I take to be the Case of some of the Quotations produc'd by the Author) yet I doubt not there are incomparably more and greater Instances of true and sublime Virtue and Goodness taken in its just Extent among Christians, than among those of any other Profession or Character. And indeed as the Gospel undeniably sets before us a more finish'd Idea of Goodness and Purity than any other Institution, and inforces it with far stronger and nobler Motives; so on Supposition that there are Persons
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among profess'd Christians that heartily believe the Gospel, and endeavour to conform themselves to it both in the inward Temper of their Minds, and in their Practice and Conversation; of whom I doubt not there are many, notwithstanding the too general Corruption and Degeneracy, and I myself have had the Satisfaction of knowing several such in the narrow Compass of my own Acquaintance; they must certainly as far transcend those of other Religions, as the Gospel evidently transcends them all in the Advantages, Helps, and Encouragements to a holy Life. And if there are many among professed Christians very wicked, they are generally such as either content themselves with the Name of Christians, without taking any pains to get a just Acquaintance with the Religion they profess, or who do not allow themselves seriously to consider and lay it to heart, or else who do not really believe it. And I doubt not the growing Infidelity of the present Age is one great Cause of the abounding Wickedness of it.

The proper Remedy against all these Disorders and Corruptions is, not to endeavour to weaken and discard the Authority of the Gospel, which wou'd render the World far wickeder than it is, but to endeavour to recall Men to a stricter Regard to the heavenly Doctrines and pure and excellent Laws of Christianity. This, if any thing, wou'd reform and reclaim a degenerate Age. Nor can there be a greater Proof of the strange Force and Power of that Corruption of the human Nature, that is so strongly and affectingly describ'd in the Holy Scriptures, than that it is able to resist the Force of such admirable Motives as the Gospel furnishes to ingage us to the Practice of Righteousness, and which one wou'd think if attended to cou'd scarce fail to make the World easy, virtuous and happy.

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And though the Author seems to think, that Christianity is not proper to form Heroes, or great and good Men, and therefore is for sending us to the Institutions of the Philosophers, p. 166 *. yet I think it is manifest, that if Care were taken to train up Youth to an early Acquaintance with the Christian Religion, as contain'd in the Holy Scriptures, its heavenly Doctrines, its holy Laws, its glorious Promises and sublime Hopes; nothing cou'd possibly have an apter Tendency to form them to the most excellent Dispositions, to an ardent Love to God and Zeal for the divine Glory, to an extensive Charity and Benevolence towards Mankind, and to an exemplary Purity of Heart and Life, and a noble Government over their Appetites and Passions; and to ingage them to a steddy persevering Constancy in well-doing, in opposition to all the Terrors of this World, and the Fears of Death itself. And this seems to me to be true Heroism, of which there have been incomparably more Instances among Christians than ever there were in the Pagan World.

Thus I have gone through the Objections this Writer has advanc'd against the Revelation contain'd in the Holy Scriptures. Most of 'em seem to me to be of little Force, and if others of 'em are attended with considerable Difficulty, it ought to be consider'd that there is scarce any thing in the World, not even the most evident and important Truths, but may have Objections made against them, and perhaps some of them pretty hard to solve; which arises from the Narrowness of our Understandings, and our being unable to take in a full Comprehension of Things in their just Harmony. I own that many Objections may be brought against Christianity, but so also are many Objections brought against the Providence and Attributes

tributes of God, and against his Government of the World; and some of them attended with as great Difficulties as any of those that are brought against the peculiar Doctrines of Revelation. If Christianity can be prov'd by such Arguments as are sufficient in their kind, and if it comes attended with all those Proofs and Evidences that cou'd reasonably be desir'd, supposing a divine Revelation really given, (and this I think has been shewn to be the Case) we are oblig'd to receive it as such, and not to do so is highly criminal.

Our Author indeed seems to make himself very easy on this Head. He takes some pains to shew that Faith is no Virtue, and Unbelief no Crime, p. 51, 52 *. And what he offers on this Head, if it proves that it is not necessary to believe the Doctrines of reveal'd Religion, will equally prove that it is not necessary to believe the main Principles of natural Religion. For his Argument proceeds all upon this Supposition, that Faith or Unbelief is a Matter of mere absolute Necessity, and what a Man cannot possibly avoid. But this is far from being true, as every one knows that is at all acquainted with the human Nature. What is more usual than for Men to shut their Eyes against Evidence, and refuse to give Truth a fair Examination, when a favourite Lust or Interest lies in the way? Every body knows, that evil Prejudices and Passions, wrong Affections, the Byas of Interest, Pride, and Vain-glory, have a mighty Force to cloud and pervert the Judgment, and hinder it from a just Discernment of Things; and that tho' *Men* (as this Author alledges) *can no otherwise believe than as Things appear to them*, yet Things often appear very differently to us through our own Negligence and corrupt Prejudices, and a slothful perverse or vicious State of Mind, from what they wou'd appear if we took the Care that be-

* P. 44.

becomes us in Matters of such Consequence. That may not seem evident to one Man through his own Fault, which to another better dispos'd, and who brings a Mind candid and sincere and open to Conviction is evident. Faith indeed consider'd merely as a notional Assent (which seems to be all the Author understands by it) is not alone sufficient, yet this does not prove but that it may be of great Necessity and Importance. To believe a God and a Providence is not alone sufficient, for the Devils believe and tremble, yet it is necessary as it lies at the Foundation of all Religion. And tho' the Author, in order to shew that Faith in Christ is unnecessary, pretends to prove, that the intire Design of his Coming was merely to be a Preacher of Repentance, which he endeavours to prove after his manner, from a single Text or two separately taken, without comparing them with other Passages, p. 48, 49 *. yet if he will take our Saviour's own Account of himself, Faith in him is not so indifferent a Matter as he wou'd have it thought to be. *He that believeth not, is condemn'd already, because he hath not believ'd in the Name of the only-begotten Son of God. This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil, John 3. 18, 19. And when the Jews asked, What shall we do, that we may work the Works of God? he answered, This is the Work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent, John 6. 28, 29. It was the Voice from the magnificent Glory, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him, Matt. 17. 5. How shall we escape if we neglect so great Salvation, which began to be spoken by the Lord himself, and was confirm'd unto us by them that heard him? &c. Hebr. 2. 3, 4.*

If this Author therefore thinks proper to make believing in Christ an indifferent Matter, yet he ought

ought not to pretend that the Scripture makes it to be so too. He thinks indeed *if the Tree brings forth good Fruit, the Means by which it is produc'd are not material*, p. 51 *. But if God has provided excellent Means, for any one to reject those Means, under pretence of obtaining the End without them, must certainly be a very great Guilt, and highly displeasing to the Deity. And it nearly concerns those who believe that God has in his great Goodness favour'd us with an excellent Revelation, of vast Consequence to our Salvation and Happiness, to stand up with a hearty Zeal for the Authority and Credit of it, in opposition to all those that under any pretence whatsoever wou'd endeavour to deprive us of so inestimable a Treasure. This I have endeavour'd to do according to my Ability in this Work, and to God and to his Blessing I humbly commend it. But whatever be the Success, I have the Satisfaction to have contributed my Endeavours to the asserting and promoting the Interests of that holy Religion, in the Faith of which I hope to live and die.

* P. 44.

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